Dulcimer Players news

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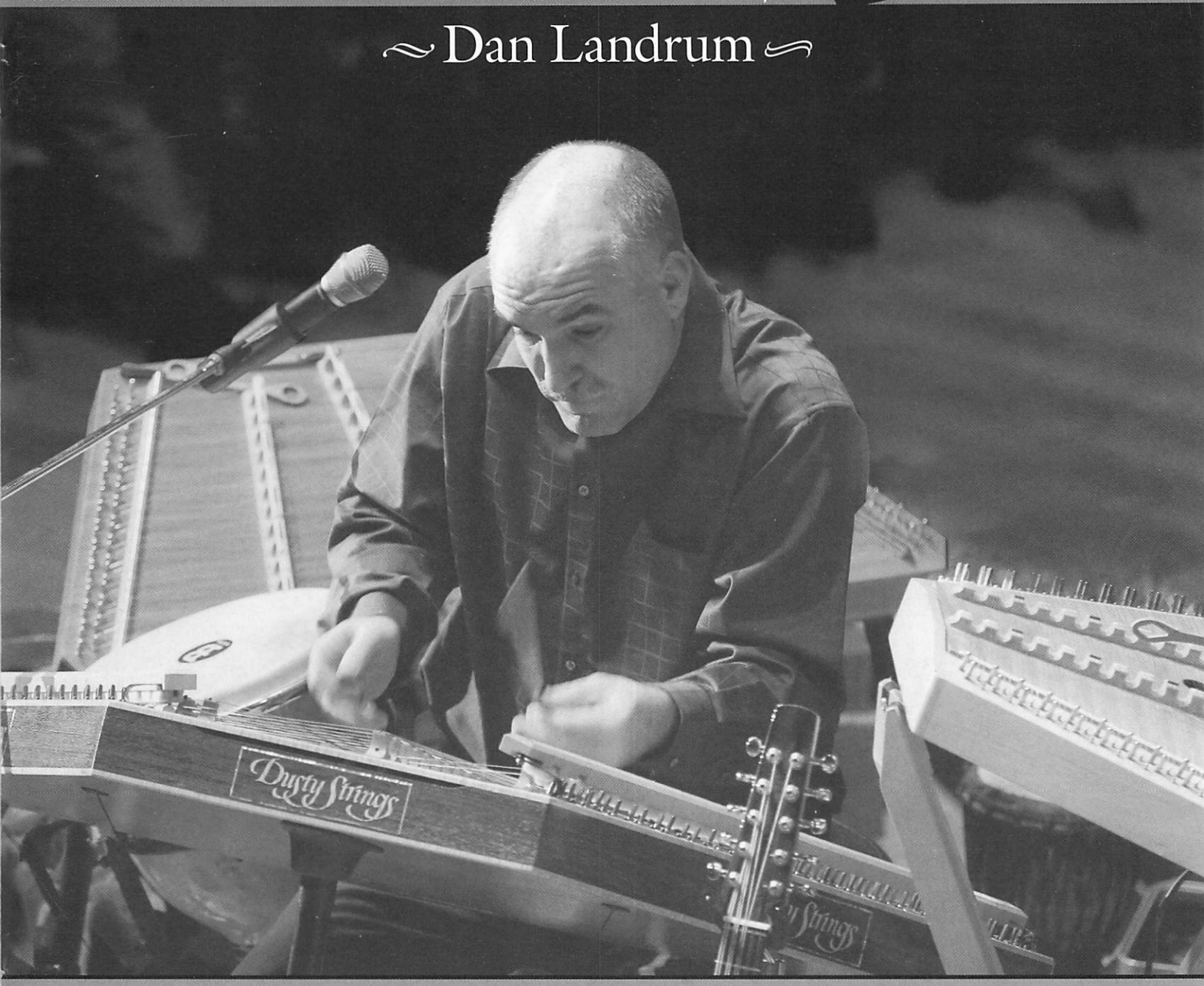
Dan Landrum



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- ★ Historic Box Dulcimers
- ★ Dulcimer Music In The Theater with Jeff Sebens and Barbara Bates Smith
- ★ Minor Considerations on the Dulcimer

Dulcimer People...

- ★ Jeff Hames: Blazing New Trails
- ★ John Bascetta: From New England to England
- ★ Dan Landrum: There's No Place Like Home

Plus

Music, Reviews, Events, and more . . .

Our 32nd year!

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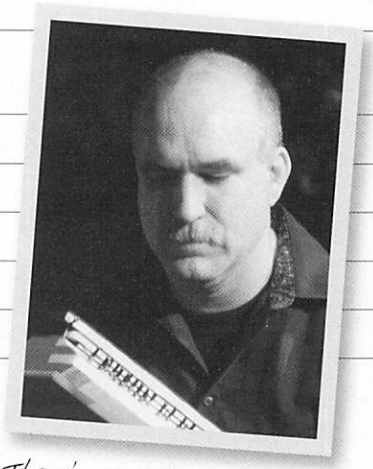

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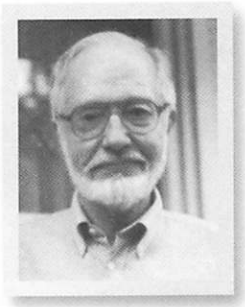

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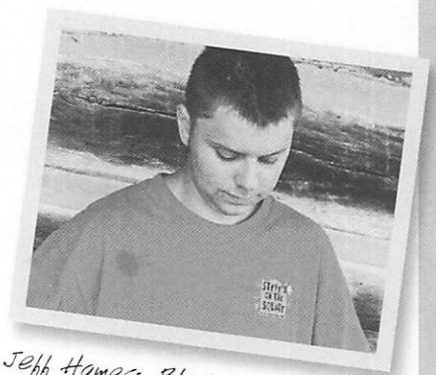

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Mountain Dulcimer History • **Ralph Lee Smith**

Hammered Dulcimer History • **Paul Gifford**

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The Art of Performing • **Steve Schneider**

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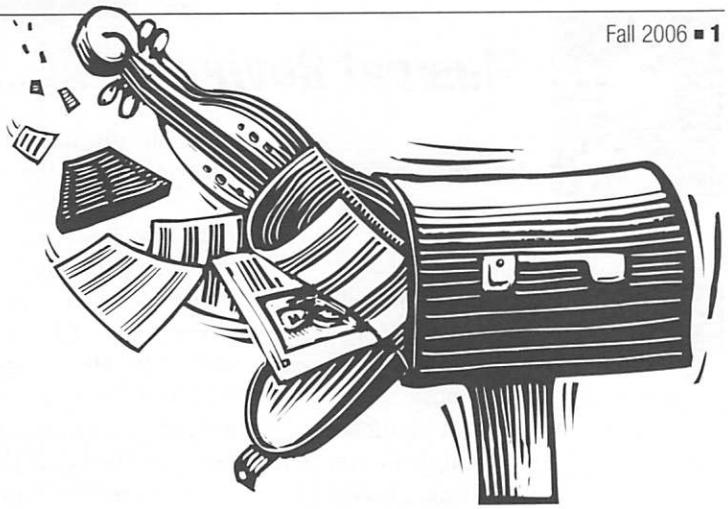
Dear Readers



A recent (yesterday, the day before and the day before that, etc.) visit to the mailbox at home brought (surprise!) another batch of items for the shredder and the recycling bin. If you hear that I've gone around the world in a luxury suite on the QE 2, you'll know that I signed up for two or three or four of those credit card offers, knowing that folk music would help me pay back the debt plus interest in a hurry! Instead of signing up immediately for the cards, a long ago memory tickled my interest.

I was, perhaps, eight or nine years old, and I was fascinated with travel and adventures. I perused magazines and sent off for brochures, fantasizing about the day I'd visit Rhode Island or New Mexico or Kansas or Germany. Postcards entered the picture also. My collection was large (wish I still had it) and organized. Then one day the envelope arrived.

Miss Madeline MacNeil was the recipient, and there was a real stamp and a return address of something like, We Got You Agency, Washington, D. C. I was terrified! Here I'd asked for all of these travel brochures, knowing I'd possibly never go there during my elementary school vacations. I'd wasted their printing and postage money; I'd been caught! Would I spend my school vacations in a detention center instead of on the Riviera? (Now, we folksingers need our eccentricities, and I've always had mine.)

That letter remained unopened for at least three days. Finally, with shaking hands I took the letter out of the envelope. It was from a transportation center, asking me to consider their facility when I traveled to interesting tourist sites. Now my hands were even more sweaty. How did they know I was interested in traveling? How did they get my name and address? That stopped my brochure requests for many a year.

I now know how they got my name and address, as do we all. But I want you to know that whenever you search through the bundle of credit card offers, mystery book club invitations, home mortgage refinancing entreaties, magazine subscription solicitations and diet club membership requests—they didn't find you through us! We tell you this most of the time, via subscription forms and when you subscribe via the telephone. It's time to tell you again.

A few years ago someone asked me to change her first name on our subscription list to her real first name. She uses various nicknames so she'll know who sold her information to another company. She'd received the DPN and our renewal reminders addressed to BunnySue (or whatever she used), and nothing else. It's that time of year again when catalogs and envelopes will fill your mailbox. You'll know us by the smiling dulcimer player on the front of the DPN, not by any offers for mortage interest loans at 1-½% that you can't refuse! We do not lend, sell or rent your address information. Ever!

If I change my mind about getting all those credit cards, do you want to go with me on the QE 2? (My treat.)

Maddie MacNeil

NETWORKING

Closing dates for the February 07–April 07 DPN
(To be mailed to subscribers in mid-January)

Information for News & Notes, Letters, Events, etc: Nov. 10th

Unclassified Ads: Nov. 10th

Display Ads: Nov. 10th (space reservation), Nov. 20th (camera-ready copy)

Ad Prices

Unclassified Ads:

45¢ per word. 4 issues paid in advance without copy changes: 20% discount.

Display Ads:

1/12 page $35 • 1/6 page $70

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Inside back cover $450

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For inquiries concerning interviews and articles, contact us for details and a style sheet. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome. For returns of manuscripts, photos, or artwork, please enclose a stamped envelope; otherwise DPN is not responsible for their eventual fate. The DPN reserves the right to edit all manuscripts for length and clarity. The opinions expressed therein are not necessarily those of the Dulcimer Players News.

Technical Dulcimer Questions
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Musical Reviews

Neal Walters

Gingerthistle is husband and wife team Ben Seymour and Becky Cleland and they play traditional Celtic and Appalachian folk music using mountain dulcimer, bones, mouthbow, banjo, acoustic guitar along with some fine singing. Ben is also a dulcimer maker. Ginger explains the origin of their name: "Many years ago, when Ben and I felt ready to share our music with the public, we tried at length, with no luck, to come up with a name that fit and inspired us both. So I sat down one day and begin to write combinations of words that sounded nice and had positive connotations. When I tried ginger and thistle together, I liked the combination very much — the sound of the spoken words suggest the trickling of a brook, or a whispering breeze bearing, perhaps, a hint of wildflowers…at any rate, Ben liked it, so Gingerthistle we became. Ginger, a country spice, and thistle, a country flower — worthy symbols of the folk music we love." The two have been performing since 1980 and **Live at the University of Maryland** is their third CD, a recording of a live performance given March 17, 2005 at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University. The concert was designed to educate and to entertain, so the spoken introductions are a key ingredient of the presentation. Ben and Becky are steeped in the mountain tradition and filled with an abiding love for the music. This comes across clearly in a concert setting; perhaps even better than on a studio recording. Most of the tunes are Appalachian or Celtic standards with a mountain touch, performed simply but with great sincerity and skill, amply demonstrating why this music is so enduring.

Chris Carlisle is a busy lad in his home studio in Eastern Kentucky. **Broomsage Hollar** is his third CD in the past year or two and, like his previous efforts, the music is original and played solo on his McSpadden custom koa dulcimer. Chris explains that when he started writing his own tunes for the mountain dulcimer, he wanted to "convey the feeling of sitting on the front porch surrounded by family and friends playing music until deep into the night surrounded by the Appalachian Mountains." Strongly influenced by both Lee Rowe and Larry Conger, Chris has been playing dulcimer since 2004. His playing has steadily become more assured while remaining intensely personal and true to his stated purpose. He coaxes a seemingly endless bounty of tunes out of our "simple" instrument, expertly balancing traditional strumming and more modern picking techniques. He also evokes some compelling images, both in his playing, and in his liner notes, of life in his "neck of the woods." The simple pleasures of exploring the surrounding countryside, finding the best spot to pick blackberries, listening to the owls and remembering the special people in his life are all translated into the kind of dulcimer music that harks back to earlier generations in Eastern Kentucky.

Doug Noll is a medical group practice administrator. He began his music career in a folk group during the 1960's, once auditioning for the position of Johnny Cash's road manager. He plays guitar and pennywhistle in addition to the mountain dulcimer, which he plays very well indeed. (He was the Tennessee state dulcimer champion in 2000.) **It's Called a Dulcimer, Part B** is Doug's first CD and the album design has a film noir movie trailer theme. (Did Part A end up on the cutting room floor?) It's an auspicious debut. With an able supporting cast consisting primarily of bassist Missy Raines and, occasionally, Lorinda Jones on whistle and harp and Sean Crewes on dulcimer, he displays substantial skill both as a performer and as a tunesmith. Eight of the album's thirteen selections were written by Doug. The movie theme metaphor that Doug chose for the design is actually descriptive of the music too as the various songs give the impression of a movie soundtrack with each song and each scene evoking distinctly different moods. Rambaldi's Dirge is dark and foreboding; Kathy's Dance is sunny and sprightly; The Peloton (which I'm guessing refers to bicycle racing) could easily have been part of the sound track to "The Triplets of Bellville" if I'm right about the definition. The music seems to cry out for Lights! Camera! Action! on the big screen. You should buy the album and decide for yourself. The playing is top notch and the design concept is a winner too.

Speaking of sound tracks, hammered dulcimer player Tim Seaman has made a cottage industry out of producing CDs with wide screen themes that celebrate the pioneer history of his home state of Virginia. **Jamestown: On the Edge of a Vast Continent** is his latest and commemorates the 400th anniversary of the Jamestown settlement. Tim plays dulcimer, flutes, psalteries, and numerous other instruments and focuses on the 17th century with arrangements of pieces like Old Hundredth, Tallis Canon, Scarborough Fair, and The Water Is Wide. He has guest appearances by Early Music specialists from the College of William and Mary in authentic period pieces and he includes new compositions including a New World Overture and flute improvisations for Powhatan and Pocahontas. He also includes three well-known spirituals, some on exclusively African instruments. Put it all together, stir it up a little and your imagination easily brings the cultures of Europe, North American and Africa together to honor the Jamestown settlement as a crucially important part of our American heritage. Tim's musicianship is perfection itself, and the ensemble's (which includes Ardie Boggs, Thomas Marshall, Ruth Griffioen, Timothy Olbrych, and Henry Smith) playing on hammered and plucked dulcimers, flutes of many kinds, harpsichord, harp, lute, psaltery, guitar, kalimba, and percussion is drop dead superb. But his lush arrangements and his ability to paint pictures of the settlement in your mind are the real treats.

While we're at it, let's call attention to an actual sound track! Steve Eulberg has composed an original sound track to an excellent video, **A Serenade to the Canada Goose**. Subtitled "programming for relaxation," the video is a production of Positive Communication, Inc. This company specializes in videos tailored to the capabilities and

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tastes of low-functioning adults and geriatric patients, making the therapeutic effects of positive, soothing communication available in inexpensive, easy-to-use formats. The accompanying music is soft, soothing, and relaxing and is selected to support the topic and mood of the productions. The videos focus on the beauty and serenity of nature and rural America, and take advantage of the documented potential of these subjects to relax and gently entertain geriatric clients. On this particular video Steve plays mountain and hammered dulcimers, banjomer, Indian flute and guitar as a backdrop to some gorgeous footage of the Canada geese in the wild. The video is 27 minutes long and follows the geese through winter, spring, and summer and into the fall, when they must migrate north again. The music is an integral part of the therapy, and Steve does a great job of catching the playfulness as well as the majesty of these beautiful birds in the wild.

Lest you think I'm turning into a movie critic, let's get back to some down home dulcimer playing! David Moran won the National Hammered Dulcimer Competition at Winfield Kansas when he was only fifteen. "He is much, much older now, and probably wiser, too, but people seem to enjoy his playing anyway." Joe Morgan has played the guitar since he was a child, and "he still maintains that childlike ability to look at the world with new eyes, see the beauty in all things, and burn stuff with a magnifying glass." Together they make some of the best music you'll hear anywhere. **On Their Best Behavior** is their newest recording, and it's a real treat as usual. They kick it off with a Green Day tune and, before they're through, give a nod to Allen Toussaint, Lennon & McCartney, Red Foley and Gene Autry, Cyndi Lauper, the Tijuana Brass, Bob Wills, Louis Armstrong and Cannonball Adderly in addition to their own compositions which more than hold their own. Guy George on alto and soprano sax and steel drums and Scott Odena on mountain dulcimer and banjo help to round out the general insanity—which is a lot more creative than crazy, believe me. Like most world class clowns, these guys can make you cry just as easily as they can make you laugh. Slipping Away, a moving tribute to the late Dr. Bill McNeill, is a case in point, as is Joe's homage to his dog Floyd. On the upbeat side, you can't help but grin on tunes like Java, Spanish Flea/Tijuana Taxi, and Dixie Cannonball. These guys make great music together. Don't miss it!

Reviews

Gingerthistle, Live at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center • Ben Seymour and Becky Cleland, Kudzu Patch Productions, 2142 Coxe Rd., Tryon NC 28782, kudzupatch.net (CD)

Broomsage Hollar • Chris Carlisle, 328 Secretariat Way, Frankfort, KY 40601, 502-229-4065, chriscarlisledulcimer@msn.com, chriscarlisledulcimer.com (CD)

It's Called a Dulcimer, Part B • Douglas Noll, 32 Hickory Ridge Trail, Ringgold, GA 30736, itscalledadulcimer.com (CD)

Jamestown: On the Edge of a Vast Continent • Timothy Seaman, 127 Winter East, Williamsburg, VA 23188-1655, 757-565-1461, tseaman@visi.net, timothyseamman.com (CD)

Serenade to the Canada Goose • Steve Eulberg, Owl Mountain Music, 1281 E. Magnolia, Unit D #188, Fort Collins, CO 80524, owlmntnmusic.com (DVD)

On Their Best Behavior • David Moran and Joe Morgan, 2624 Quail Ridge, Irving, TX 75060, joe@moranandmorgan.com or david@moranandmorgan.com, moranandmorgan.com (CD)

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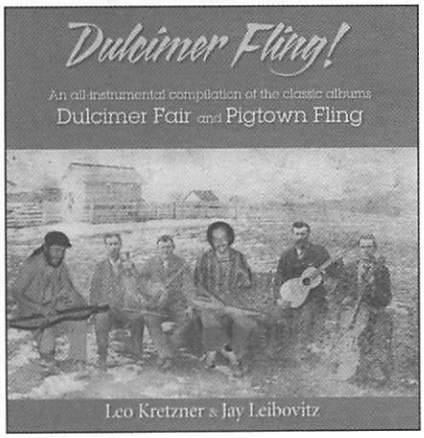

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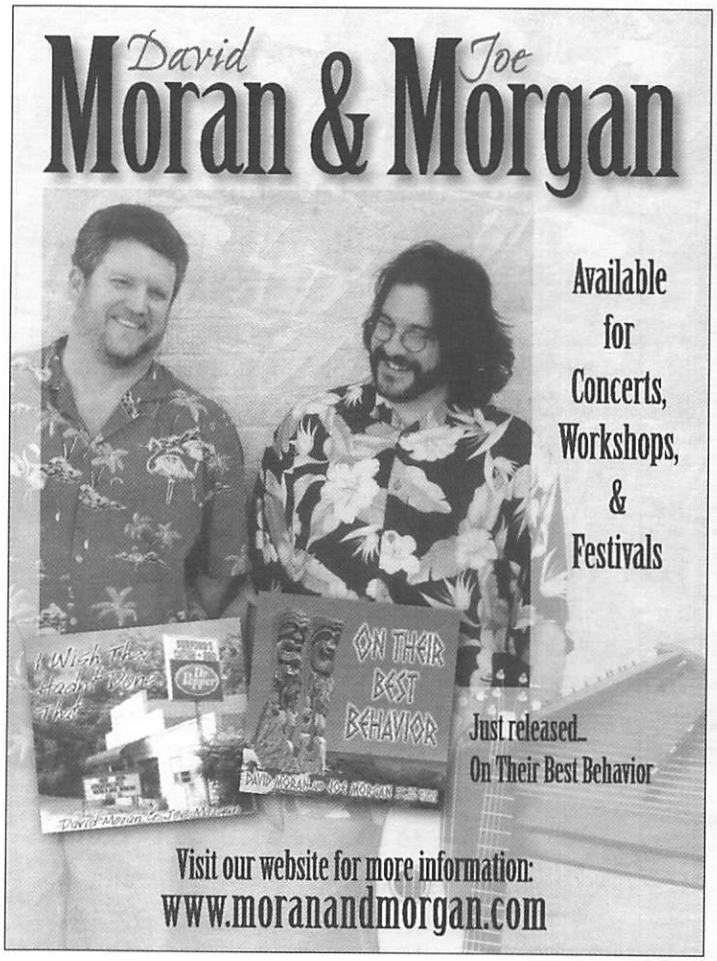


Letters To Us

Dear DPN:

Ralph Lee Smith's article in the August–October DPN had a list of hymns from the inside of an old dulcimer. I was successful in identifying a few of them with the help of a *Christian Harmony* shape note hymnal; some of the others I found in various hymn books or online. Following are the numbers I was able to identify:

2. Come Away to the Skies, My Beloved, Arise: Middlebury *(Christian Harmony)*

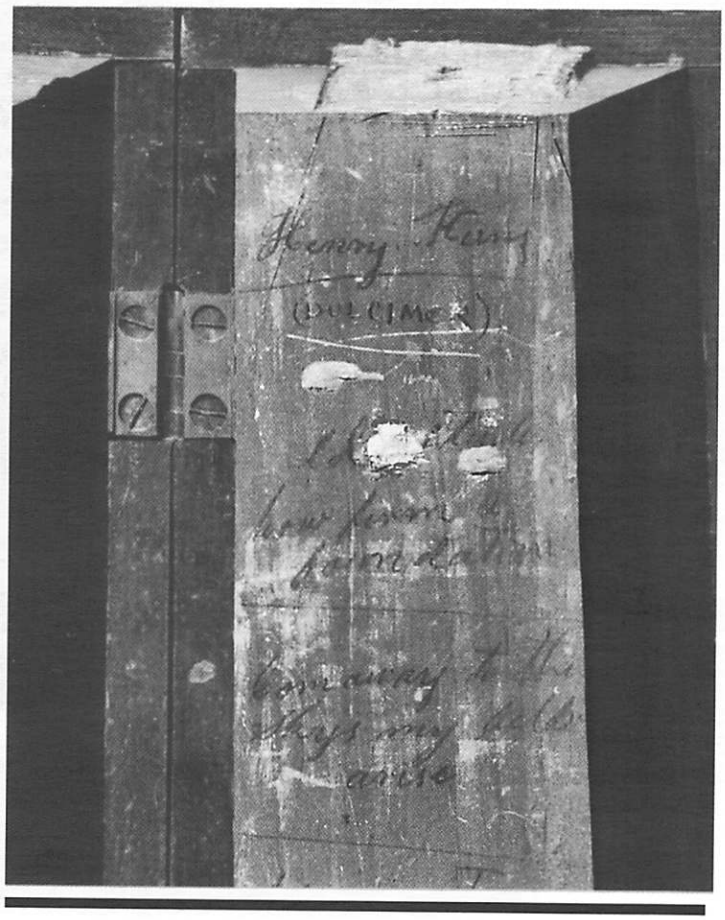
3. Arise, My Tend'rest Thoughts, Arise: Words: by Philip Doddridge, 1739; Music: Tender Thought, by Ananias Davisson. (*Kentucky Harmony,* 1816)

6. Oh When Shall I See Jesus: words: John Leland, 1793; (*Sacred Harp*) I found multiple tune names: Griffin, Autauga, The Lost City, Religion Is A Fortune, Bound For Canaan, and Ecstasy

8. Samanthra (*Christian Harmony*)

10. Green Meadows (*Christian Harmony*) and…

My Refuge is the God of Love: Solitude New (*Southern Harmony*)



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12. There Is a Happy Land: Words: Andrew Young, 1838; Music: Happy Land

14. Children of the Heavenly King: words: John Cennick, *Sacred Hymns for the Children of God,* 1742; Music: Pleyel's Hymn, Ignaz Pleyel, 1791

15. Supposedly an alternate chorus for "At the Cross" (I question this one, as it does not seem to fit the tune at all)

16. "Oh Heaven, sweet Heaven, I long for thee; O when shall I get there?" Sweet Heaven (*Southern Harmony*)

17.Dismiss Us With Thy Blessing, Lord (by Joseph Hart, 1712–1768)

18. O Happy Day (by Philip Doddridge, 1755)

Ruth Randle
Manassas, Virginia

Peggy Carter

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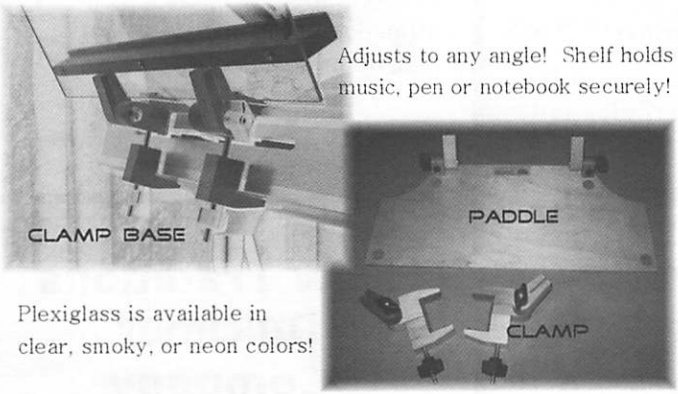

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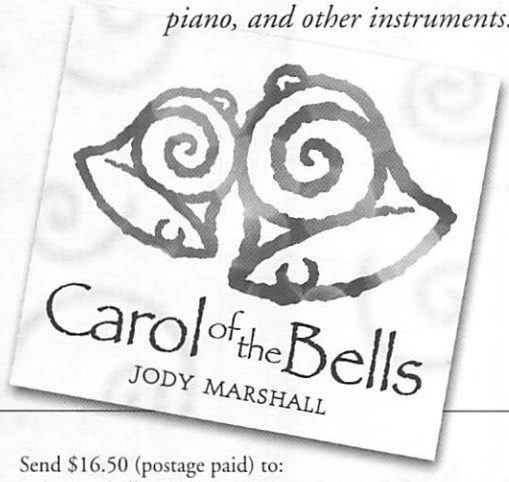

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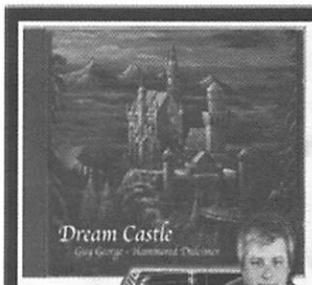

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2007 SCHEDULE

Feb 9 & 10, Winterfest , Irving , TX
April 22 - 28, Augusta Elkins, WV
April 29 - 30, National Trailways Dulcimer FestivalSpringfield, Ohio with Tull Glazener
May 5, Concert at Squire Jacob Coffeehouse,Albany NY with Brian Melick, percussionist
May 25-27,Dulci-more, Lisbon, OH
June 24-30, Kentucky Music Week, Bardstown, KY
July 8-14, Swannanoa Gathering Dulcimer Week, Asheville, NC
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Dulcimer Clubs

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DPN Dulcimer Club Coordinator
Wanda Gardner
gardnerwj@verizon.net

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News & Notes

The Aug. 7 & 14, 2006 issue of the *New Yorker,* in an article about blogging, has a quotation from a citizen-journalism site about **Ralph Lee Smith,** writer of the Mountain Dulcimer Tales & Traditions columns in *Dulcimer Players News.*

"...it seems only right that our heroes should be paragons of creativity. Therefore, I'm nominating Reston [Virginia] musician and freelance writer Ralph Lee Smith for the post of 'Local Hero, Creative Category.' Through his performances, recordings, writings, teaching, and museum exhibitions, this 78-year-old Reston resident has helped to bring new life to an art form that had been on the verge of extinction—the art of playing the mountain dulcimer. He has helped to popularize the repertoire for this instrument so that now mountain music is everywhere—even in slick Hollywood films."

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) has honored **Stan Ransom** with an Award of Merit for sustained efforts in preserving the folk music of New York State. Awards for 2006 represented 84 organizations and individuals from the United States who were honored at a special banquet during the AASLH annual meeting in September in Phoenix, Arizona.

The AASLH awards program was initiated in 1945 to establish and encourage standards of excellence in the collection, preservation and interpretation of state and local history throughout the United States. Stan, a hammered dulcimer player, was featured in the summer 2005 issue of *Dulcimer Players News.* He is on the boards of the New York Folklore Society, Traditional Arts in Upstate New York, and the Lake Champlain Transportation Museum. Since 1992 he has served as a Librarian Volunteer at Champlain Valley Medical Center Library. He is a member of the National Storytelling Network and does professional storytelling in the North Country and in Canada.

On June 24, 2006, at the Mountain Laurel Autoharp Gathering in Newport, Pennsylvania, **Karen Mueller** was inducted into the Autoharp Hall of Fame. Karen, who is also an extraordinary player of the mountain dulcimer, was honored for her activity in teaching, performing and recording, citing her as "an outstanding example of the heights to which the autoharp can be taken."

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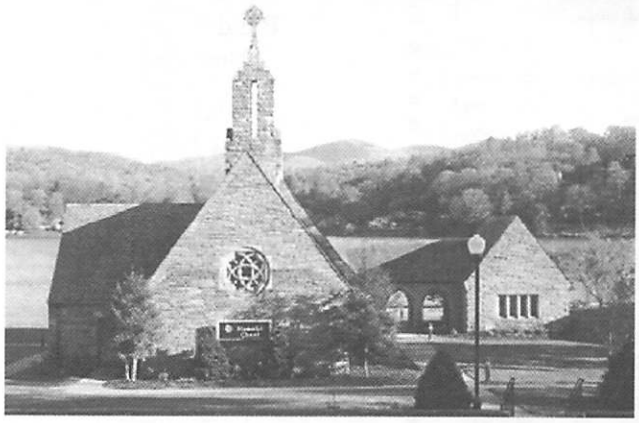

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Mountain Dulcimer Week

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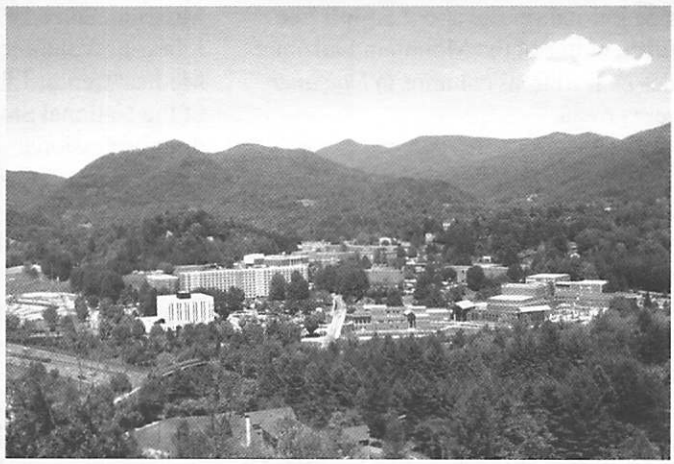

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To register send "snail mail" address to Bobby Hensley, WCU Educational Outreach, 138 University Outreach Center, Cullowhee, NC 28723. 828-227-7397. Hensley@email.wcu.edu. Winter Weekend brochure/registration form will be mailed this fall, and Mountain Dulcimer Week (Cullowhee) catalog /registration form will be mailed in February. Address curriculum or staffing questions to Lois Hornbostel, Director, P. O. Box 907, Bryson City, NC 28713. Loisdulc@verizon.net.
Website: http://edoutreach.wcu.edu/dulcimer

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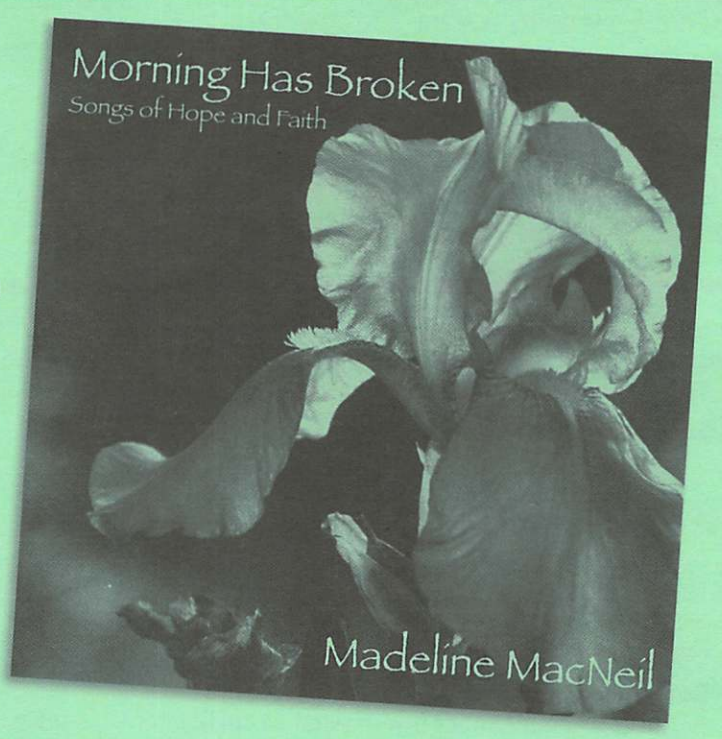

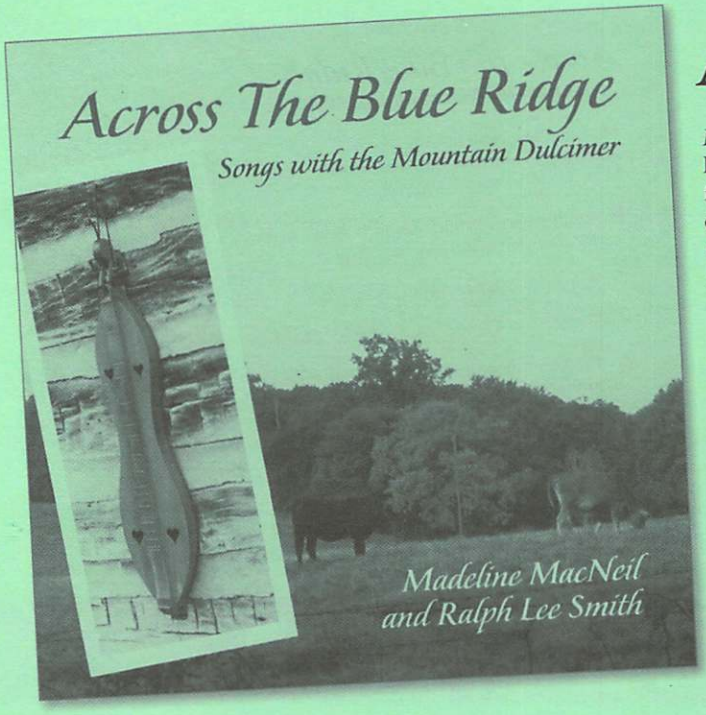

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Yorkville Music Weekend. HD, MD, fiddle workshops, jams, concert. Info: Susan Sherlock, 803-628-0543, SusanSherlock.com.

November 5–11 • Brasstown, NC
Continuing Hammered Dulcimer. Info: John C. Campbell Folk School, One Folk School Road, Brasstown NC 28902, 800-365-5724, folkschool.org.

November 5–11 • Brasstown, NC
Building a Mountain Dulcimer. Info: John C. Campbell Folk School, One Folk School Road, Brasstown NC 28902, 800-365-5724, folkschool.org.

November 10–11 • Stewart, OH
Southeast Ohio Dulcimer Festival. MD, HD workshops, concert. Info: Jerry Rockwell, PO Box 79, Guysville OH 45735, 740-662-3011, jcrmusic.com.

November 10–12 • Townsend, TN
Smoky Mountain Dulcimer Retreat. HD, MD. Workshops, concerts, jams. Info: Nancy Basford, 865-483-1121, jbasford@netstarcomm.net, discoveret.org/kadc/.

November 16–19 • Helen, GA
Foothills Dulcimer Festival. Concerts, workshops (MD & HD), open stage at Unicoi State Park. Info: NGFDA, 6065 Rosewell Rd., NE, Suite 1163, Atlanta GA 30328, 770-974-1980, mvandem@comcast.net,ngfda.org.

December 3–9 • Brasstown, NC
Learn to Play Mountain Dulcimer. Info: John C. Campbell Folk School, One Folk School Road, Brasstown NC 28902, 800-365-5724, folkschool.org.

January 12–15 • Appling, GA
Mistletoe State Park Jam. Mountain dulcimer jam and other instruments. Info: Gene Griner, 706-733-1900, hgriner@bellsouth.net, or Betty Fleming, 706-541-2146, bfleming7823@comcast.net, geocities.com/ertzmrgrt.

EVENTS CALENDAR DEADLINES

November – January issue:
Events from the 2nd weekend of Nov. through the 2nd weekend of Feb.
Deadline: August 5th

February – April issue:
Events from 2nd weekend of Feb. through the 2nd weekend of May
Deadline: November 5th

May – July issue:
Events from 2nd weekend of May through Labor Day weekend
This is our largest yearly calendar
Deadline: February 5th

August – October issue:
Events from the 2nd weekend of Aug. through the 2nd weekend of Nov.
Deadline: May 5th

Continued on next page.

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January 14–20 • Brasstown, NC
Advanced Hammered Dulcimer. Info: John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown NC 28902. 800/365-5724, folkschool.org.

January 18–21 • Lake Junaluska, NC
Western Carolina University Winter Weekend. MD classes, concerts, open stage, jamming, dulcimer orchestra. Info: Bobby Hensley, 828-227-7397, hensley@wcu.edu, edoutreach.wcu.edu/dulcimer.

January 21–26 • Brasstown, NC
Advanced Mountain Dulcimer. Info: John C. Campbell Folk School, One Folk School Road, Brasstown NC 28902. 800-365–5724, folkschool.org.

January 26–28, 2007 • Houston Hammer
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Mountain Dulcimer: Accompanying the Voice and Other Instruments. Info: John C. Campbell Folk School, One Folk School Road, Brasstown NC 28902, 800-365-5724, folkschool.org.

February 2–3 • Fort Collins CO
Colorado Dulcimer Festival. HD, MD workshops and concert. Info: Steve Eulberg,1281 E. Magnolia Unit D#188, Fort Collins CO 80524, 970-472-1352, steve@owlmntnmusic.com, owlmntn music.com.

February 3 • Loudon, TN
Workshops for all levels of mountain dulcimer players. Info: Norma Jean Davis, 205 Engel Road, Loudon TN 37774. 865-458-5493, davis_music@juno.com.

February 9–10 • Dallas/Fort Worth, TX
Winter Festival of Acoustic Music. HD, MD, autoharp, harp, guitar, and more. Workshops and concerts. Info: Linda Lowe Thompson, 309 Pennsylvania, Denton TX 76205, 940-387-4001, llt6@earthlink.net, lssds.org.

February 9-10 • Mt. Dora, FL
Central Florida Dulcimer & Autoharp Festival. HD, MD, autoharp. Info: Ruth Harnden, 6 Marlene Court, Sorrento, FL 32776, 352-735-4907, dulcirah@msn.com.

February 10 • Loudon, TN
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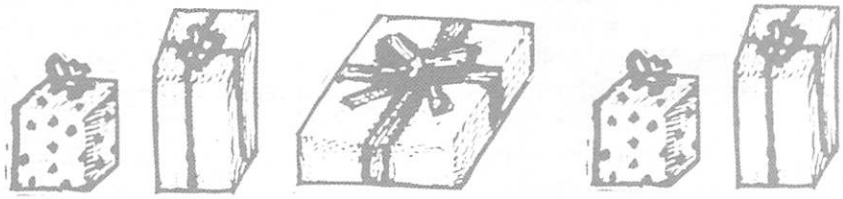

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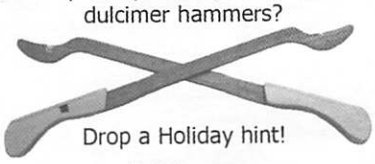
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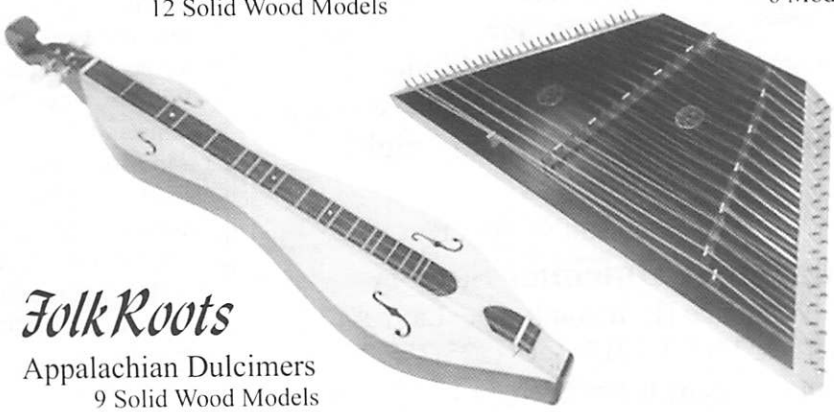
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Mountain Dulcimer Tales & Traditions

by Ralph Lee Smith

Two Box Dulcimers from Kentucky

While major interest in the history of the dulcimer in Kentucky has focused on the Cumberland Mountain tradition of "Uncle Ed" Thomas and Jethro Amburgey, there are indications of other traditions in the state that constitute frontiers of our knowledge. The two instruments illustrated with this article were both found in Kentucky, but, apparently, neither comes from the Cumberlands. Neither do they appear to belong to the tradition of "Tennessee music boxes," which are much larger. Both instruments have box-shaped bodies with straight sides. One has the vertical iron tunings pins associated with the scheitholt/zither tradition; the other has the horizontal wooden tuning pegs associated with the dulcimer tradition. The question is, are they related? If so, how?

The instrument with the iron pins and wonderful folk-art decoration belongs to the traditional-style player, Don Pedi, of Madison County, North Carolina, who teaches dulcimer traditions at the annual Dulcimer Week at Western Carolina University. Two years ago, when I was also teaching there, Don brought this instrument with him for me to see, and Josie Wiseman took these pictures.

Don received the instrument from a friend who bought it at a flea market in Bowling Green, Kentucky in the early 1970s. Nothing more is known of its history. The top and sides are painted green, and the bottom is painted a shade of rose red. A border of the same color runs around the edges of the panels and soundholes. Three diamonds are painted in black on the foot. The upper and lower soundholes are slanted diamonds. The middle soundhole and the two soundholes in the fretboard are of fanciful designs. There are eleven vertical iron tuning pins at the head, and eleven screws at the foot to anchor the strings. Only one of the strings passes over the frets, which are thin wire staples. A thin piece of leather or rubber, now partially gone, covers the strum area.. The dimensions are:

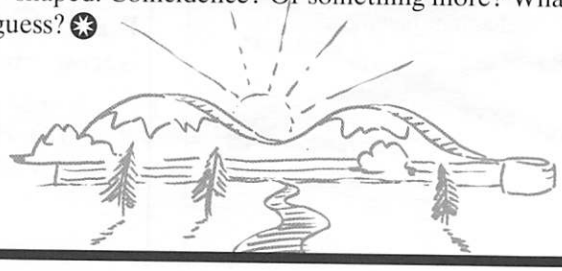
Length: 31 ½ inches
Width: 7 ½ inches
Vibrating String Length: 28 inches.

The dulcimer with the horizontal wooden pegs is one of the instruments in the collection of Anne Grimes of Ohio. Before her death in January, 2004 her collection, including this instrument, was acquired by the Smithsonian Institution, which is in the process of exhaustively studying and documenting each item.

L. Allen Smith, author of *A Catalogue of Pre-revival Appalachian Dulcimers* (University of Missouri Press 1983, out of print), visited Anne in 1974, took pictures of her instruments, and included them in his book. The instrument shown here is designated in his book as C10, and appears on page 40 with a brief description. Anne told Allen that the instrument had come from Corbin, Kentucky; she apparently had no other information.

I visited Anne in 1982 and took pictures of many of her instruments, including the picture shown here. Anne told me that she acquired many of her instruments from a "picker" who called himself, "Unaka Bill, Never Worked and Never Will." A picker is a person who spends his time haunting auctions and flea markets, and selling items to antique dealers and collectors, usually right off the back of his truck. Pickers know what their customers want, and look for the items assiduously. Unaka Bill did a wonderful job for Anne, and his finds now belong to the American people.

This instrument is different in many obvious ways from the instrument belonging to Don Pedi, but there is something that makes one wonder. The instrument's single soundhole, placed beneath the fretboard in the middle of the top, is diamond- shaped. Coincidence? Or something more? What's your guess?



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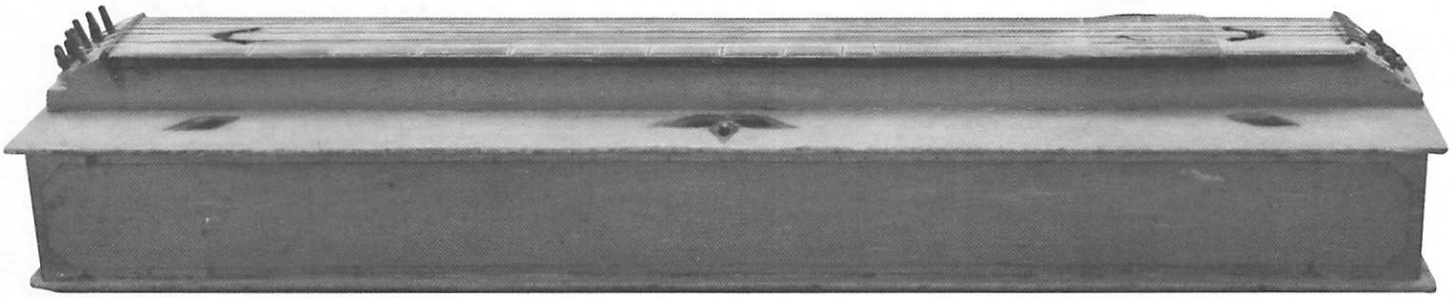
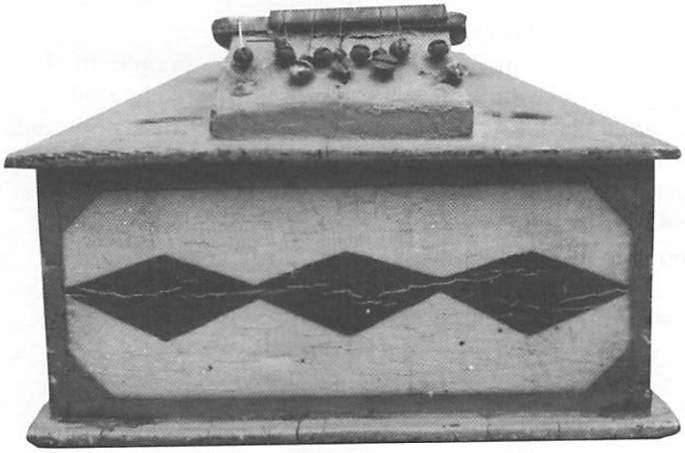
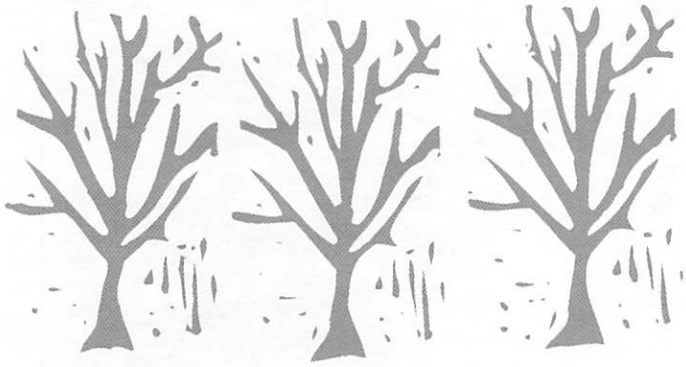
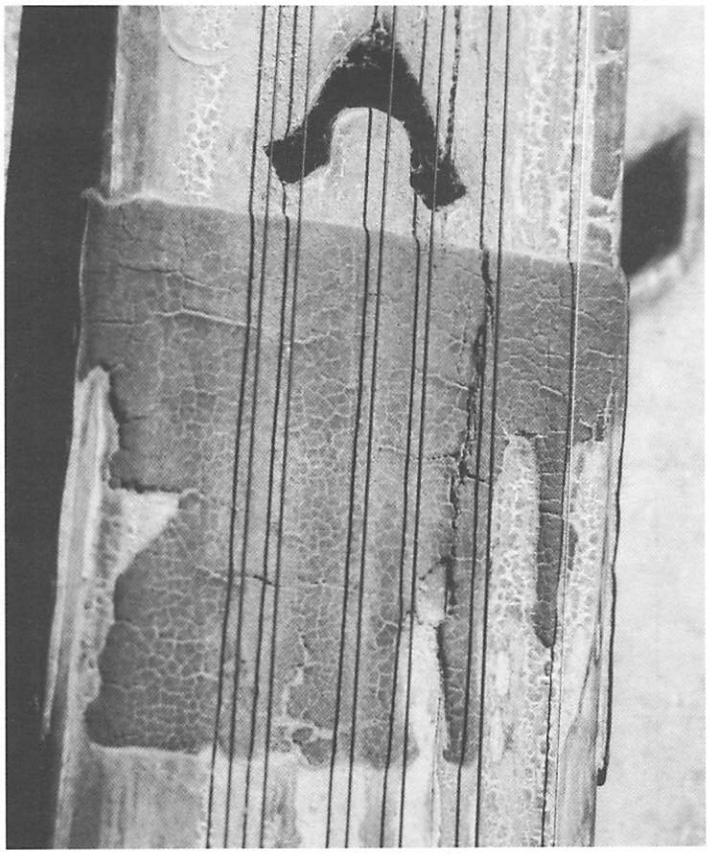


1. Don Pedi's Box-Shaped dulcimer.

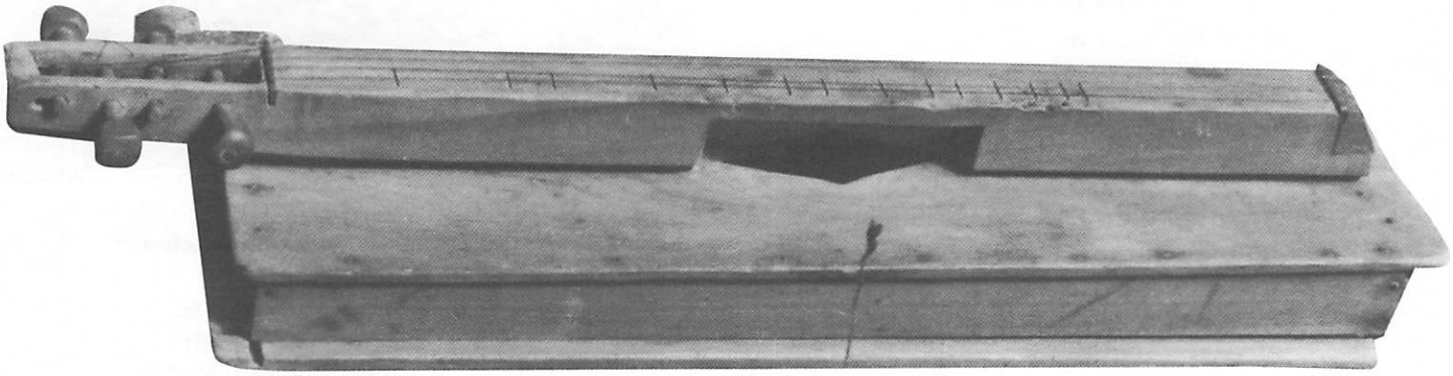


2. Foot of the dulcimer





3. Portion of the top of the dulcimer, showing soundholes, and rubber or leather overing over the strumming area.



4. Box dulcimer from Corbin, Kentucky, in the Anne Grimes collection.

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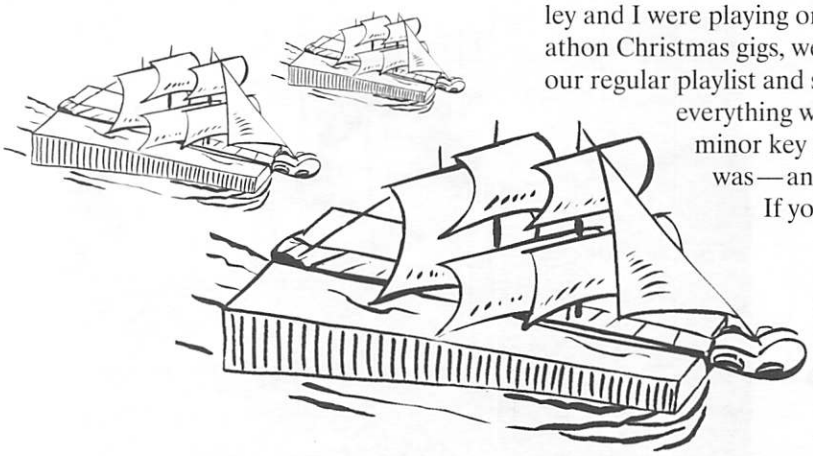
Minor Considerations

by Linda Lowe Thompson
Denton, Texas

Late in the summer of 2005, I found myself noticing the background music in a grocery store. The music was appropriate for the Christmas season. I'll admit that summer lingers longer in Texas than it does in some parts of the country, but…Among the cheery holiday notes, I recognized the most common version of "I Saw 3 Ships Come Sailing In." After a few times through, they shifted into a minor mode. Later that year, when Wesley and I were playing one of those marathon Christmas gigs, we got bored with our regular playlist and started playing everything we knew in every minor key imaginable. It was—and is—great fun.



If you're in the key of D, you can drop down two courses on your hammered dulcimer to play it in its relative key of B minor. Play it first in D, then in B minor. Now go back to D, then up one course to E minor. Move up one course to E minor, then back to D. A move to the bass bridge brings you my favorite, D minor. Try this arrangement with other holiday favorites such as "Oh Christmas Tree" or the British version of "Away In A Manger."

The minor version examples of "I Saw 3 Ships" are using the natural minor, which uses exactly the notes indicated by the key signature. Sometimes in Western music you hear the *melodic minor,* which sharpens the last tone of the minor scale when it's ascending.

Linda Lowe Thompson
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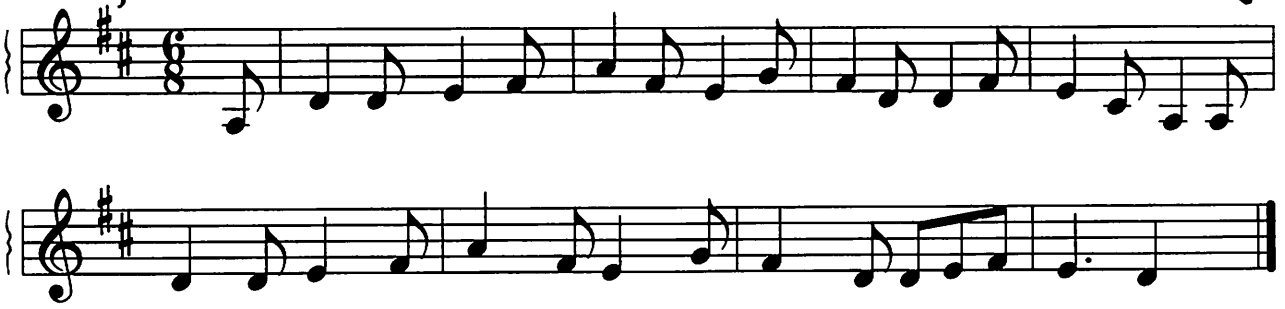
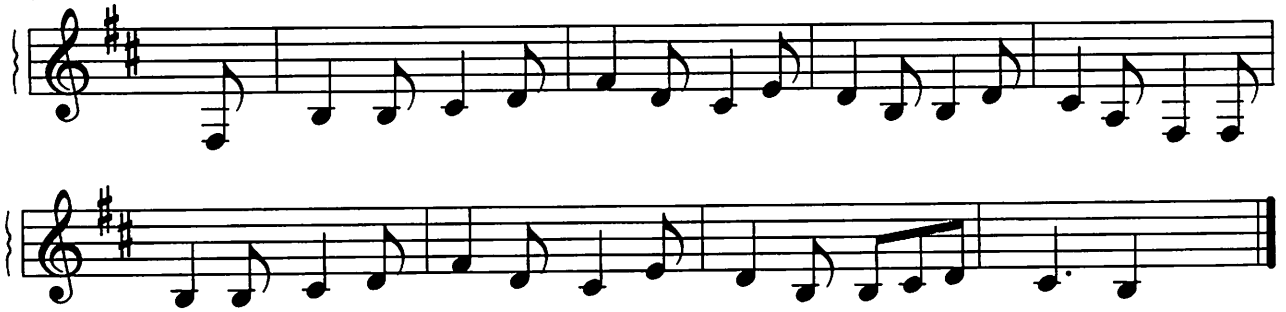
I Saw Three Ships

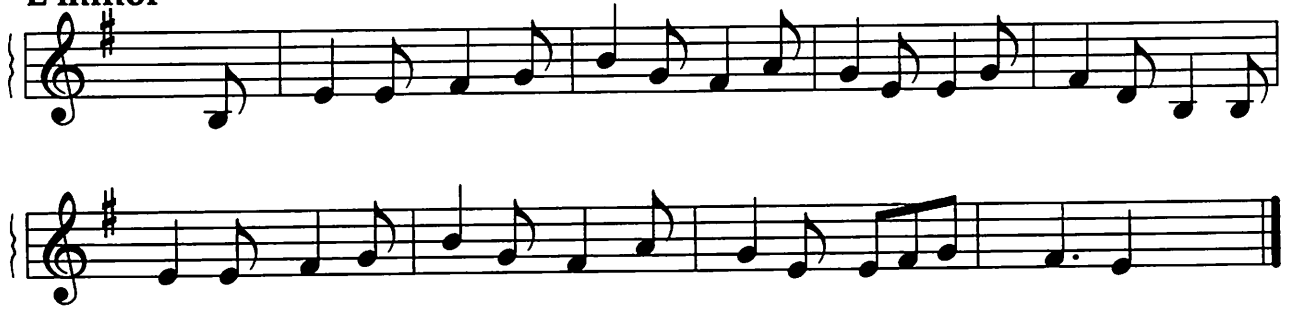
D Major



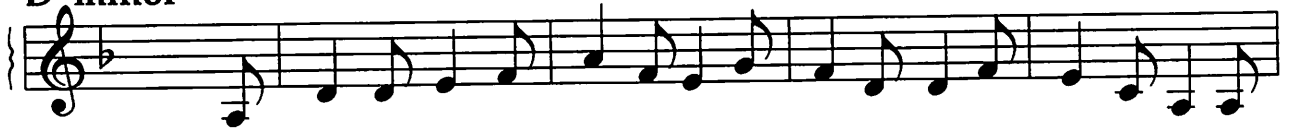
B minor



E minor



D minor



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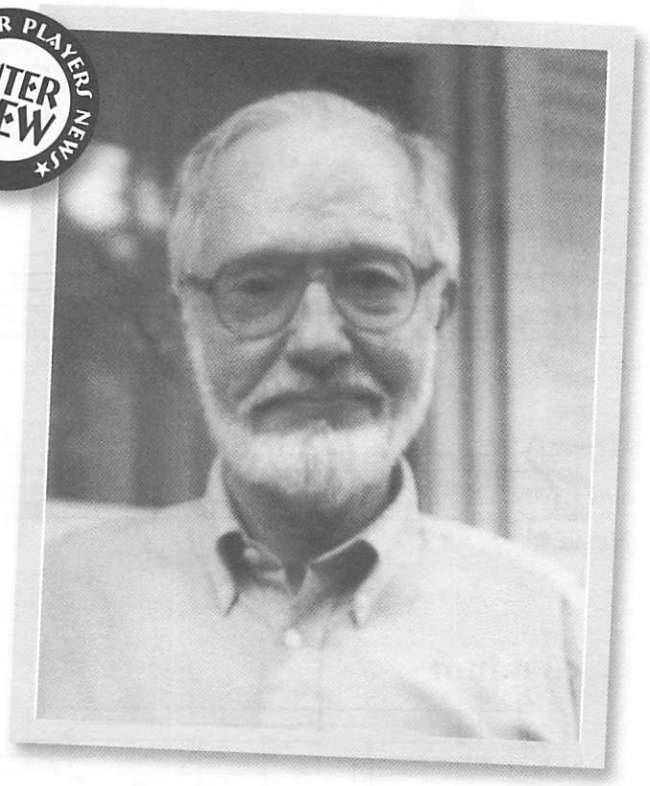
Everett Traylor:

Box Dulcimers and Whimseys

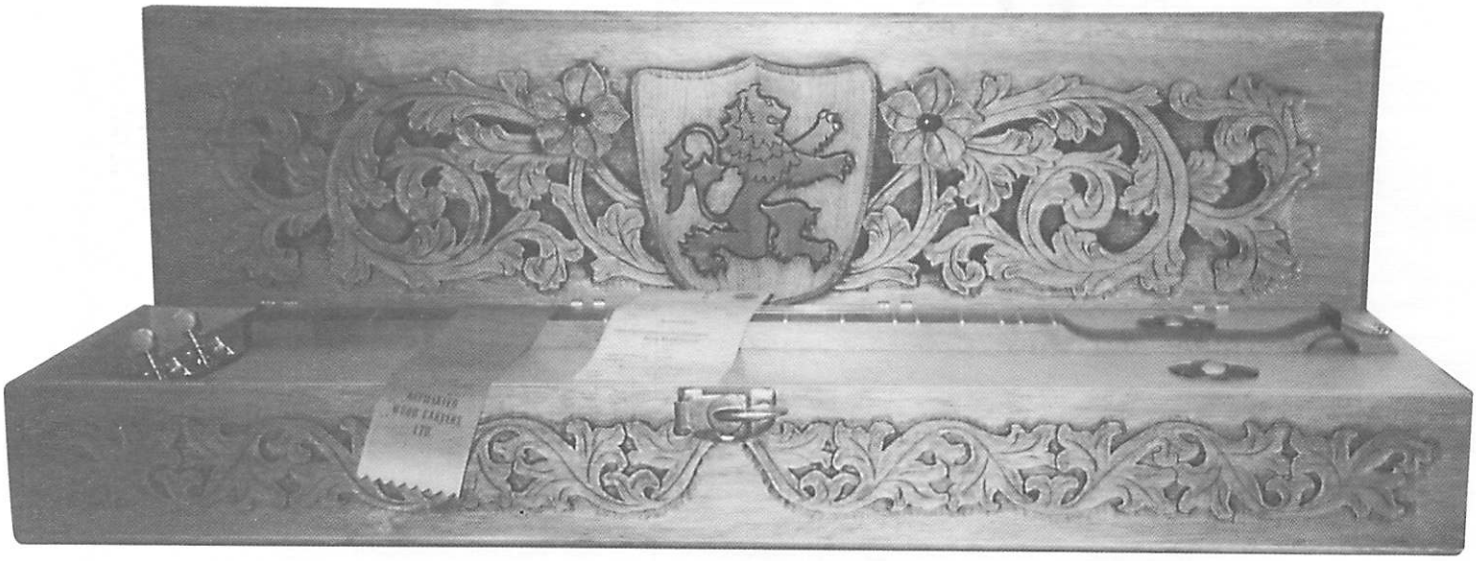


After building more than two hundred hourglass and teardrop-shaped fretted dulcimers, along with other types of instruments, I now build mostly "box" dulcimers. I also build a few instruments that could be labeled "whimsey." Articles in *Dulcimer Players News* by Ralph Lee Smith about historical box dulcimers stimulated this switch in direction.

I had already built several "micro mini" one and two string dulcimers into small jewelry box-size instruments (whimsey) but had not done any full-size box dulcimers. Ralph's articles about box dulcimers appeared in the July-September, 1993 and August-October, 1994 issues. Box hammer dulcimers (hackbretts) were shown and described by Paul Gifford in the February-April, 1997; August-October, 2002; and May-July, 2004 DPNs.

The instruments I now build are not intended to supplant what are currently built by other makers, but do add another choice. The person looking to acquire a new dulcimer may wish to stay within current styles built by many excellent builders. I do, however, enjoy the historic trace that the box dulcimer suggests and the opportunity to build in a way that presents surfaces that lend themselves to carved embellishment. The boxes also provide protection in transport as well as places to store a pick, noter, or a tuning wrench and pitch pipe. In addition to being an instrument builder, I am also a wood carver and enjoy adding ornamentation to instrument surfaces.

I build some of the fretted box dulcimers with removable lids, using loose-pin hinges. Lids on my mini box hammer dulcimers make convenient places to prop sheet music. Spare hammers and a pitch pipe or electronic tuner can be carried in spaces in the dulcimer portion of the box.



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1628 Cherry Hills Rd.
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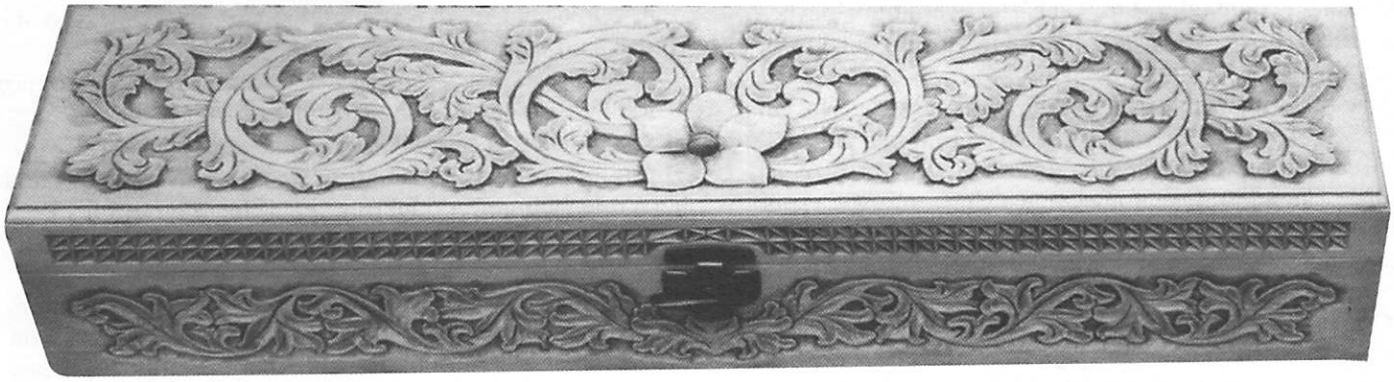
563-355-4102

[Editor's Note: Everett is now phasing out his dulcimer building, but the DPN wanted to show you samples of the beauty of his work. Each March woodcarvers meet at North Ranch Escapee Park in Congress, Arizona, for a week. This year the activities included some dulcimer jam sessions!]



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A Versatile Artistic Partnership

Dulcimer Music In The Theater

by Jeff Sebens
Cana, Virginia

Music has opened many paths to me. As a student of classical music, performing and teaching French horn, I learned the power that music has to create an emotional response. I did not discover the hammered dulcimer until 1980 when I heard one at a festival and was immediately drawn to it. Since I could not afford to buy a dulcimer at the time, I used my background in woodworking to initiate me in the construction of musical instruments. After performing and selling at a variety of craft festivals I eventually opened my own retail store, interacting regularly with people about the dulcimer. My work as a performer has led to a variety of unique collaborations, but several years ago, an unexpected opportunity arose for me to work with a professional actress iin a variety of theater productions.

I met Barbara Bates Smith at the Cherry Orchard Theater, near my home in southwestern Virginia. The Orchard is an almost magical setting for summer productions: a mountainside clearing overlooking a broad valley below the Blue Ridge. The play was "Ivy Rowe," Barbara's one-woman adaptation of Lee Smith's book *Fair and Tender Ladies,* about a young mountain woman maturing into an outspoken witness to the world around her. As I watched Barbara's funny, poignant and utterly engaging portrayal of Ivy Rowe, I knew that the music of both the lap dulcimer and hammered dulcimer could add another layer of depth to that production.

After the play, Barbara and I talked. She had been learning lap dulcimer—she also plays piano, harp, autoharp, guitar, and harmonica—and music was an instant bond between us. Barbara told me about using a recorded soundtrack for her one-woman Off-Broadway production of "Ivy Rowe" and how she longed for live musical accompaniment. That was something I could offer, I told her. Her eyes lit up; maybe mine did, too. We were eager to explore how we might work together.

The first opportunity came when Barbara was performing a version of Frank Levering's play, "The Emerald Ghost," in Greensboro, North Carolina. It tells the true story of a woman who grew up near my home, living a strange, secluded life in a remote mountain cove. Because of the role of traditional music in mountain culture, the dulcimer was a natural choice for accompaniment. Even though I would be in Greensboro only for the performance itself, with no time to rehearse, Barbara and I wanted to give it a try. That was very trusting of Barbara! The director told me where music would work best in the play and sat nearby to give me hand cues when necessary. With a little bit of prompting from him, that first production went beautifully. Our collaboration was judged a success, and since then we have worked together on Barbara's adaptions of works by North Carolina writers Lee Smith, Kaye Gibbons, and Fred Chappell along with several one-act plays and Barbara's monologues.

Having had some theater experience, both on the stage and as a pit musician, I was well aware of what music can do for a live production. Most obvious, music during scene changes helps hold the mood and avoid dead space. It is equally important for musicians to respect the role of silence. (At some points a little silence does more than anything else to augment a particular mood or highlight a subtle meaning.) Music also can be used to deepen emotions that are projected from the stage and enhance the work of the actor. Barbara feels that the musical underscoring empowers her acting as well, helping her reach a greater depth of character. And of course a little pre-show music can help set the mood.

As a musician, this continues to be a rewarding experience. Working with Barbara, I help choose the music for a given production and decide where it can be used most effectively. This is not normally a time for me to try particularly demanding music, but it offer opportunities to focus on various aspects of musicianship: dynamics (so you blend with rather than overwhelm the work on stage) and tempo and velocity (so that the music begins and ends at appropriate times, for example). I especially enjoy working closely with Barbara on matters of interpretation, to ensure that the music expresses the desired mood. In contrast with my usual role as a solo

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musician, collaboration with another artist offers a different level of artistic expression.

When we began looking for chances to use our partnership, "Ivy Rowe," interwoven with mountain culture, was a natural. We have traveled with it throughout the Southeast and presented it in a variety of settings. Then we realized that dulcimer music did not need to be limited to "mountain" themes. Some of the other productions in Barbara's repertoire include Kaye Gibbons's "Ellen Foster," which deals with coming of age and child abuse, and Barbara's monologue, "The C-Word" which deals with her experience as a cancer survivor and her portrayal of a woman dying of cancer in the production "Wit." The hammered dulcimer in particular tends to draw a deep emotional response from listeners.

Barbara and I performed a pair of one-act plays in Florida in April, 2006. The first, Alan Bennett's "A Bed Among the Lentils," moves back and forth between the world of an Anglican church and an Indian merchant's small shop. Playing the hammered dulcimer, I drew on traditional high-church hymns as well as music suggesting Indian melodic forms. The second play, a monologue about Barbara's spiritual journey, was accompanied by the lap dulcimer, featuring hymns familiar in the South. For both plays I provided a few percussive touches using small ethnic rythm instruments.

The dulcimer is no stranger to stage productions. Most notably, Steve Schneider brought life to "The Secret Garden" on Broadway, and many hammered dulcimer players have participated in productions of "Quilters" around the country. I see the use of dulcimer music in this way as one more aspect of the maturing of this music as it is introduced to new audiences and new musical genres. This is gratifying because many of us dulcimer players are in something of an "evangelical" role when it comes to our instruments. We are always on the lookout for new converts!

Responses to my collaborations with Barbara have been heartwarming. Audience members often comment that the music adds an appealing layer of artistry, which includes subtle and seamless commentary on what is happening on stage. We were particularly pleased with Lee Smith's response to "Ivy Rowe:" she experienced the dulcimer's voice as "an integral part of the story."

Barbara and I find satisfaction in our partnership—from developing initial ideas for a piece, to rehearsing, to performing. We feel privileged to support the other's work, and honored to bring a new dimension to each other's art.

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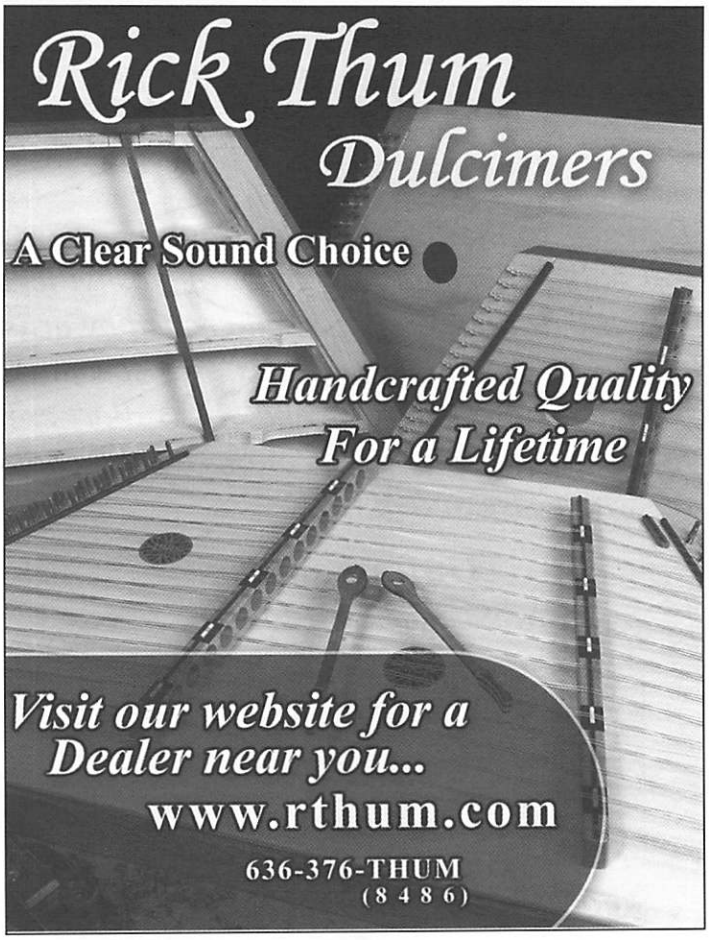
Jeff Sebens builds and plays hammered and lap dulcimers, as well as a variety of other traditional instruments. He has performed and taught throughout the Southeast for 20 years.



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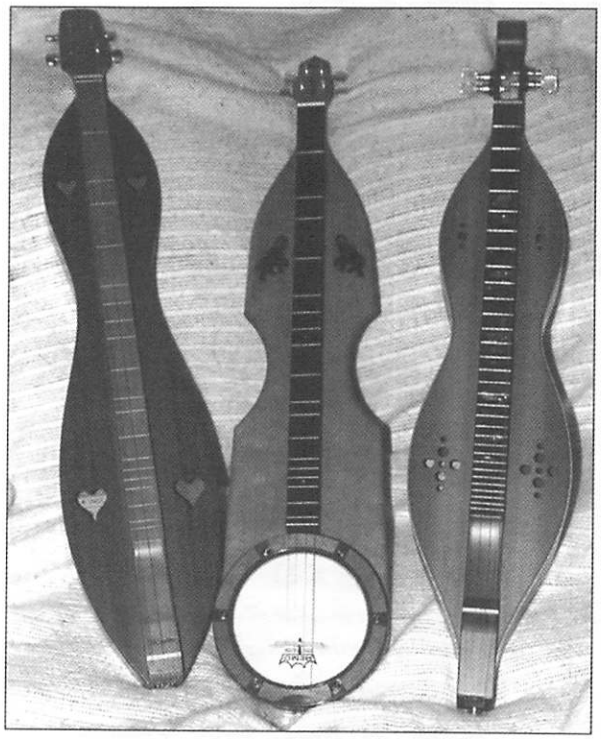

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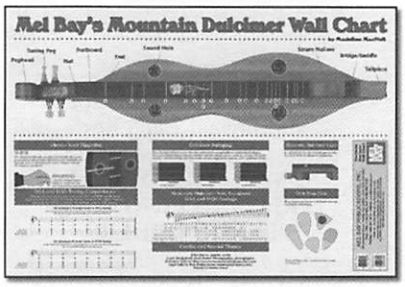

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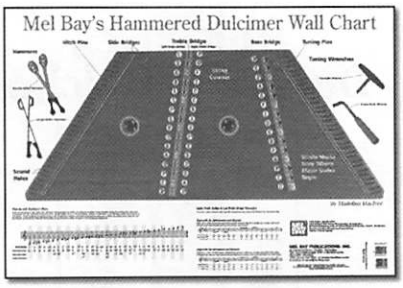

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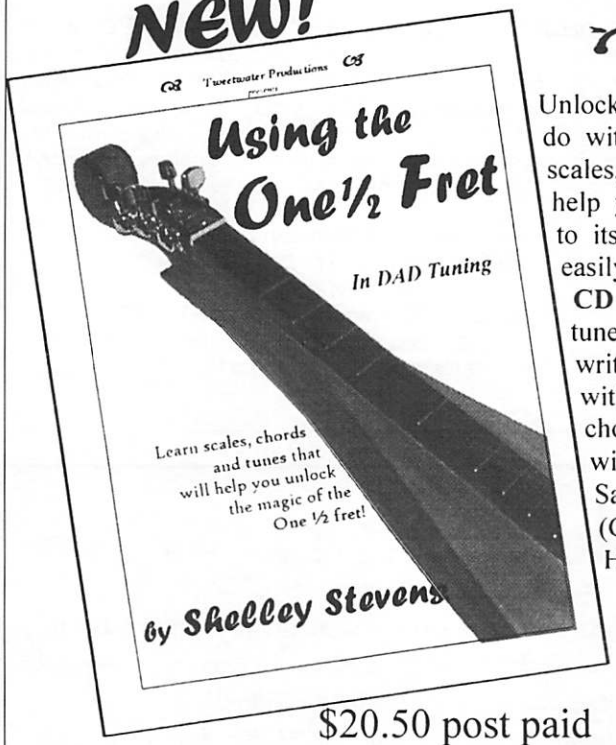

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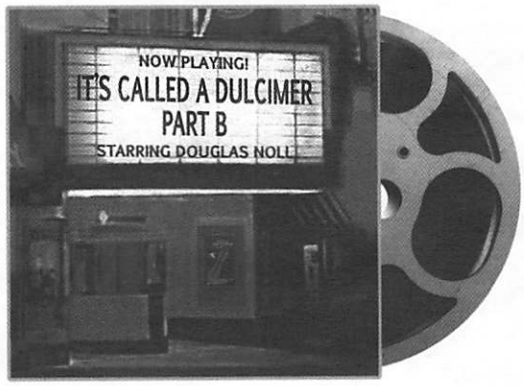

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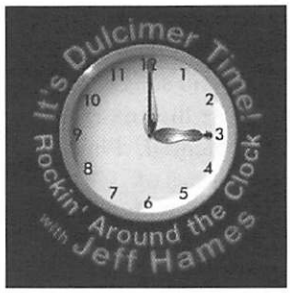

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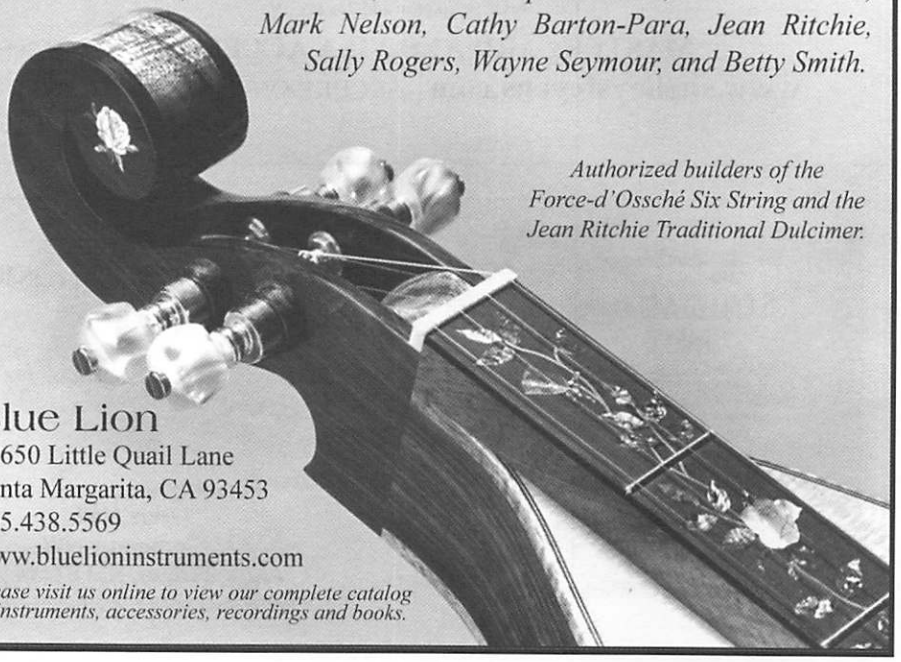

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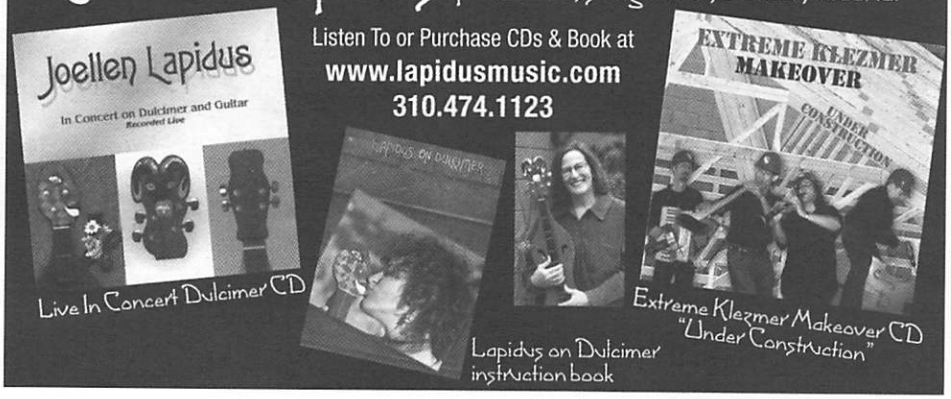

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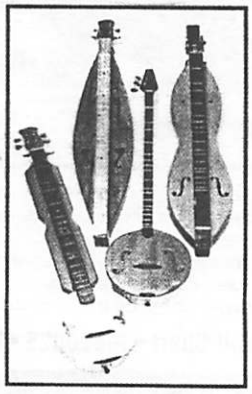

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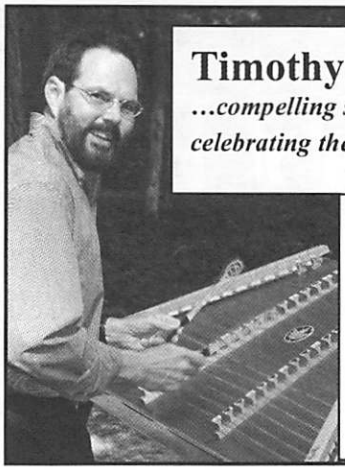

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There's No Place Like Ho

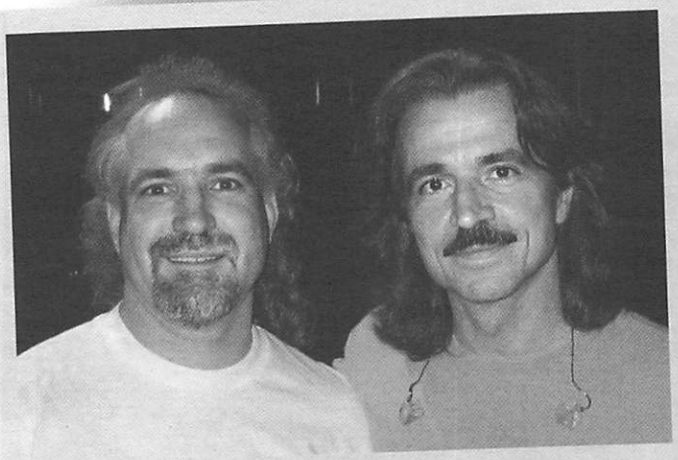
by Randy Clepper
Gahanna, Ohio

If you've channel surfed across a public television station recently there's a good chance you saw a Yanni concert being used as a fund raising program. If you stuck around long enough to see the concert you would have seen a hammer dulcimer featured prominently on several songs. The player is Dan Landrum, and the worldwide television exposure is perhaps a first for hammer dulcimer.

I met Dan Landrum about eight years ago, through a discussion group on the internet. I wanted to trade a hammer dulcimer for some recording equipment, and Dan had some gear he wanted to sell. As it turns out, he lives in Chattanooga, Tennessee, not far from where I grew up. I mentioned that there was no need to ship anything, as I was planning a visit to my old home town in a few weeks to visit my mother and take in a festival there. I was surprised when he replied, "I'm playing at that festival! Why don't you bring your instrument and join me?"

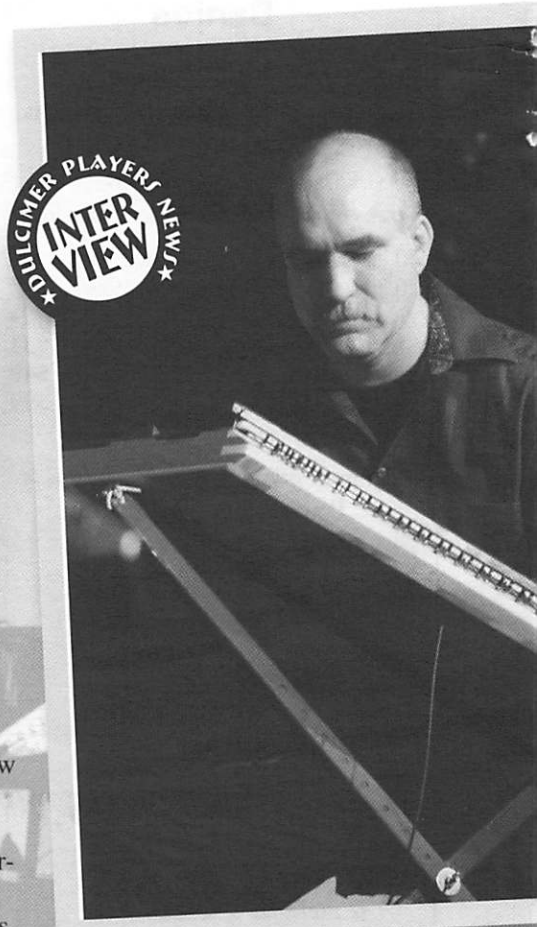
Arriving at the festival, I didn't know what to expect. I met Dan as he was setting up, and almost right away we started to play some tunes. What I heard was a refreshingly original style that blended simple melodic beauty with intricate rhythmic patterns and lightning-fast technique.

Dan was first introduced to the hammer dulcimer in 1987 when, as manager of an NPR station, he heard Malcolm Dalglish's song "New Waltz" come over the airwaves. He recalls rushing into the studio to see the album. "I had to know what was making that cool sound. I'll never forget the feeling I had when I found out this was an instrument you hit with sticks!" He did a little research and bought his first instrument less than a week later.



Dan and the moustached one.

"I've played drums and percussion since my childhood, and hammering a dulcimer felt like something I'd done all my life. Two weeks after buying that first instrument I played my first solo at church. The song was 'St. Basil's Hymn,' which I learned by listening to the rest of the Malcom Dalglish album *Jogging the Memory,* on which 'New Waltz' is also found."



Dan good light

Dan soon learned there were many opportunities for hammer dulcimer performances. For the next several years the number of gigs he played increased to the point that after he completed his first CD, *Questions In The Calm,* he quit his job in public radio to pursue a full-time music career. He spent his summers street performing at the Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga. "That decision to leave the security of a real job was scary," he said, "but so far I don't regret it. Having that first CD to sell, and seeing those sales do quite well, was encouraging. I felt if I wasn't making enough to pay the bills, I'd just play longer and work harder."

That hard work paid off, as his street performing became such a fixture in Downtown Chattanooga that he was offered a regular stipend by the city to keep it up. In the years that followed, Dan's reputation grew and he was asked to entertain at other Chattanooga area attractions. He has since been featured with the Chattanooga Symphony twice, traveled the eastern United States with a touring production of the show "Quilters," performed at two Presidential inaugurations and at Olympics ceremonies.

"Anyone who plays publicly soon discovers that it is

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me...An Interview with Dan Landrum

doing gigs that leads to getting more gigs. I've always gone out and created my own gig if work was slow."

It was while street performing at the Tennessee Aquarium one summer afternoon in 2002 that Dan's biggest break of all occurred. A recording engineer from West Palm Beach happened to be passing through the Chattanooga area with his wife and children. They decided to get out of the car for a while and stopped at the aquarium. He listened to Dan play, bought a couple of CDs and said he wanted to give one to his biggest client, the well-known Greek composer Yanni. "A couple of months later I received a call and was invited to come to West Palm Beach for an audition to join Yanni's band. I got the gig!"

Since then they've performed hundreds of concerts in cities across the United States, Canada and Mexico, with many more dates scheduled. Visit Dan's web site for the most recent schedule where you can also read his daily journal with stories and pictures from his travels.

"Playing with Yanni has been one of the most interesting things I've ever done. I'm surrounded by outstanding musicians, have gotten to play many of the most famous venues in the country and have met thousands of nice people. I get email just about every day from people who want to know more about the hammer dulcimer after seeing one for the first time at a Yanni concert. Knowing that I might actually influence someone to start playing is a great feeling."

Dan says while the Yanni gig is interesting, the travel schedule is often exhausting. "We are generally on the road for six week tours which are preceded by two to four week rehearsals. This can mean being away from home for nearly six months a year with combined tours. The supposed glamour of life on the road pales in comparison to the joy of being home. My children are grown now; I would never have done this when they were younger. My wife, Angie, flies out to visit me every couple of weeks, but I still think I'm happier street performing in Chattanooga and sleeping in my own bed at night. Every time we go back on the road it is harder to leave home."

In August 2006, Yanni released a live DVD/CD which features Dan playing hammer dulcimer solos on several selections. It is now in regular rotation on public television stations around the country.

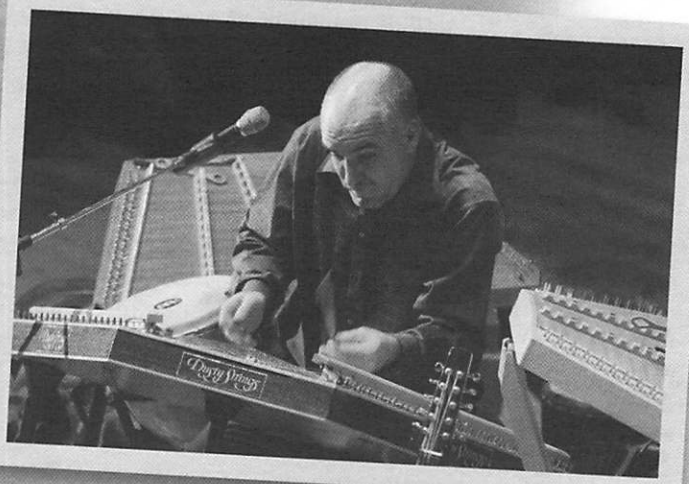
In his first thirteen years of playing, Dan had never attended a dulcimer festival. He says, "I didn't even know dulcimer festivals existed until I subscribed to *Dulcimer Players News.* By then I was too busy performing in the Chattanooga area to attend any. In the summer of 2003, that changed.

"Quite a few people had told me that if you can only go to one festival, it should be the Funfest in Evart, Michigan. What an eye opener that was! I had never seen so many hammer dulcimers in my life, and it was incredibly moving to experience the joy to be found there."

Dan says he was nervous when he was given a performance spot on the Evart stage Friday night. "I had played in front of tens of thousands of people many times but this was the first time I had ever performed in front of dulcimer people. I had no idea how they would react." His fears vanished when he received a standing ovation and sold out of CDs after the performance.

It was while jamming in the rabbit barn later that night that Dan met Mark Wade. "Randy [Clepper] and I were introduced to Mark Wade and Bob McMurray. We all started playing and swapping songs and quickly found that I didn't know much of the standard fiddle tune repertoire so common at festivals. We just started making things up." It was that jam session that led to the formation of the band Hammer On!.

"Those listening that night kept asking us how long we'd played together and where they could buy this music. So we decided that it would be fun to try and do some recording. The four of us spent time over the next year writing and arranging material together, and completed the project in the fall of 2004." The band discovered a real chemistry as they worked together, each bringing a bit of their own back-



Performance

Continued on the next page.

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ground into the project. "Mark is an amazing player and arranger with a classical and old time music background, Randy plays traditional Irish music on a variety of instruments, Bob has roots in both rock and classical guitar, and I was a drummer!"

"The response to the release of the *Hammer On!* CD has been incredible," says Dan. In May 2005, the band teamed up with aerial dance troupe Project Bandaloop and Yanni band members Hussain Jiffry and Zachary Carretin for the Chattanooga Grand Celebration on the Tennessee River. "Think ballet meets rappelling," referring to Project Bandaloop as they performed aerial dance numbers while suspended from a bridge over the Tennessee River. The troupe choreographed their performance to music written by Dan and Hammer On!

Since Dan's first festival appearance at Evart, he has taught and performed at a number of festivals and says he's hooked. He and Angie organized the first Chattanooga Dulcimer Festival in his hometown in June 2005, and were happy to see it grow in 2006. The festival is in the beautiful mountaintop community of Signal Mountain, which overlooks the Tennessee River and Chattanooga.

Dan owns and regularly performs on a variety of instruments from the tiny Russell Cook soprano to an extended range Dusty Strings D600, which he uses on the Yanni tour. "I'm currently busy writing and exploring on my James Jones Linear Chromatic, which appears in several cuts on the *Hammer On!* recording. My latest baby is a Jerry Reed Smith Grande Concertmaster five octave chromatic. This instrument has become an integral part in my latest project which is a jazz influenced recording with a group we're calling ZitherJaz. It includes drums, piano, guitar, bass, percussion and of course hammer dulcimer.

In the past few years Dan has branched out into recording music for others as well and has recently produced and engineered CD projects for Mark Alan Wade, Butch Ross and Christy Burns, Stephen Humphries and Kathleen Jerrel.

Dan's signature style is indicative of a new breed of players who draw upon rudimental percussion techniques as a basis for their playing . His hammer dulcimer percussion fundamentals method book is scheduled for release this December.

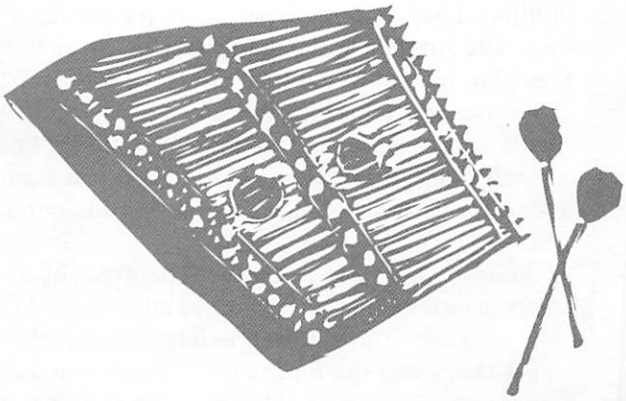
"I remain excited by the possibilities for hammer dulcimer in all kinds of music. It is very encouraging to see so many new younger players out there experimenting with this instrument as if there are no limits."

My guess is Dan will never stop experimenting. It will be interesting to see where he takes the hammer dulcimer and where the hammer dulcimer takes him.

Dan Landrum
1040 Druid Drive
Signal Mountain, TN 37377
dan@danlandrum.com

Keep up with Dan and Hammer On! and the Chattanooga Dulcimer Festival by visiting danlandrum.com and hammeron.com.

Randy Clepper plays Irish, Celtic, and other forms of traditional music on cittern/bouzouki, guitar, tenor banjo, and hammer dulcimer. When he is not performing with Hammer On! he plays in two central Ohio-based traditional bands, Aisling and Begley's Braes, and is active in the Columbus Irish music session scene. You can find information on Randy, his recordings, and upcoming appearances on the web at randyclepper.com and hammeron.com.



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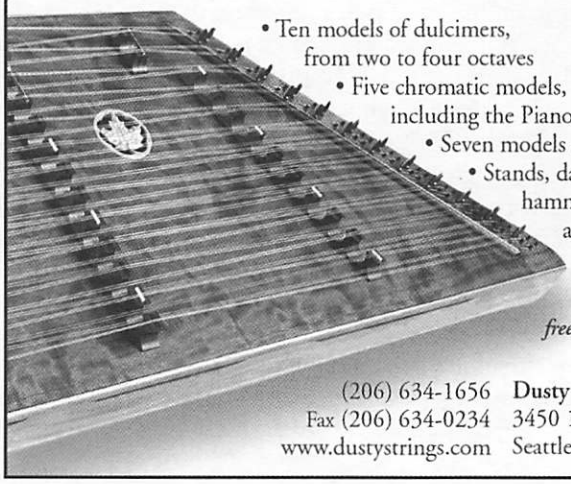

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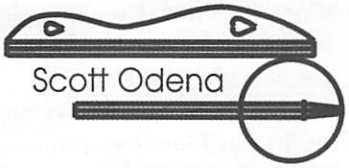

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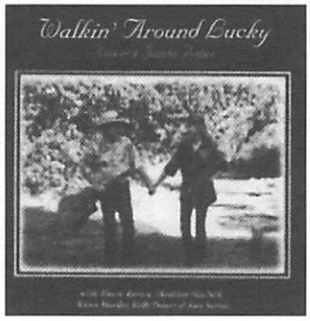

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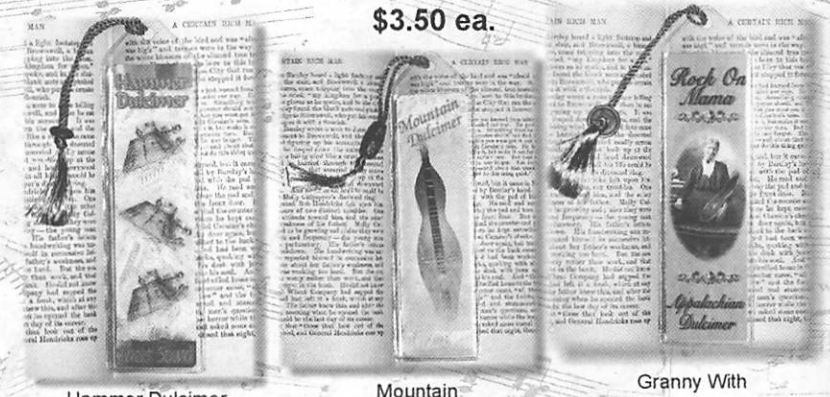

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Jeff Hames:

Blazing New Trails

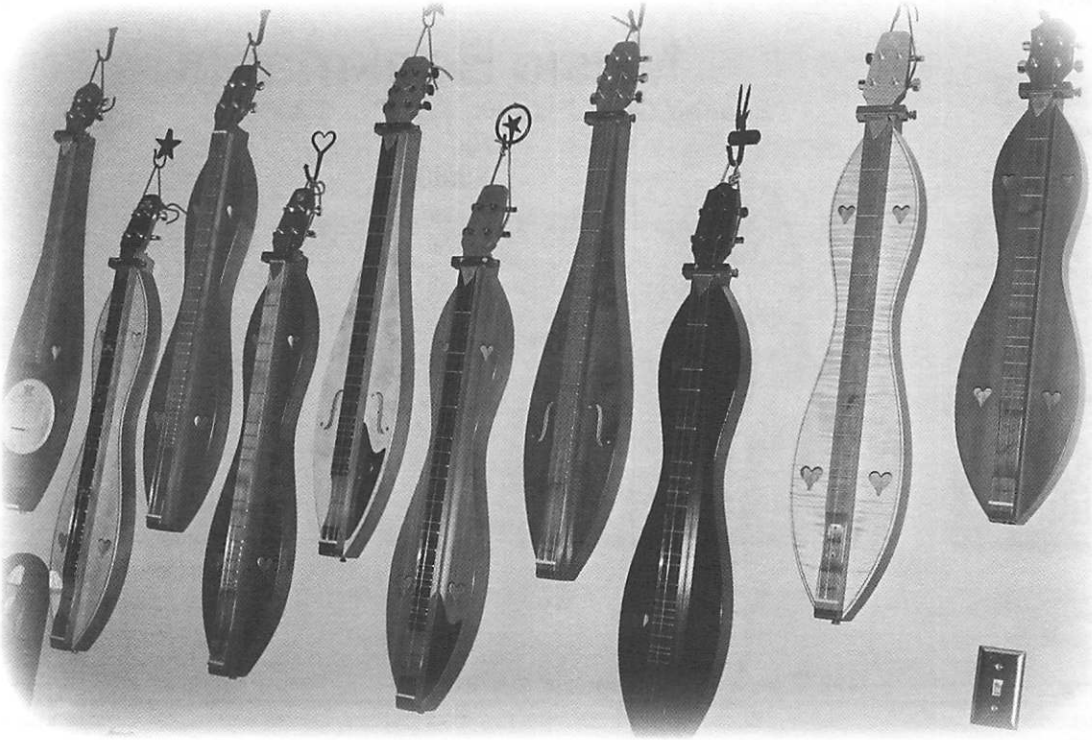
by Deb Porter
Pittsburg, Texas

Jeff Hames, from Madison, Mississippi, may be the first mountain dulcimer player to solo with a high school marching band. This talented young musician, now 18 years old, has nurtured his love of the dulcimer throughout his teen years and accumulated many accolades not usually related to the mountain dulcimer, including being the soloist for the Madison Central High School Band. In addition, Jeff's original dulcimer tune, "Folklore," was the first mountain dulcimer composition to win the instrumental division of the New Song showcase at the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas in 2005.

Jeff has also achieved top honors in the more traditional mountain dulcimer contests, placing 1st at the 2006 Southern Regional Mountain Dulcimer Contest in Mountain View, Arkansas, and continuing by placing 1st in the mountain dulcimer contest in Winfield, Kansas in September 2006. These competitions, while proving his abilities, take a backseat to Jeff's love of the mountain dulcimer.

Jeff started learning the mountain dulcimer and honoring its musical beginnings at the age of nine by watching his grandparents, Bobby and Wanda Calhoun. They have been playing the dulcimer for 14 years and currently perform during open stage events at dulcimer festivals and at local churches, nursing homes and other special events in Mississippi. When Jeff started playing the dulcimer he and his grandfather, Bobby Calhoun, formed the group The Generation Gap.

In the 8th grade Jeff was asked to play traditional music for a video his class wrote, performed and produced. The project, titled Natchez Trace Television, is part of the Tracing Our Trace project funded by the National Geographic Society and the Mississippi Department of Education. It was distributed to all of the schools in Mississippi as a learning tool. He has been listed as an artisan for the school district and is requested by teachers and students to perform programs at local schools.



Jeff's wall of dulcimers.

"I feel that music is the universal language. We may not understand the meaning behind the music but we do understand the emotions. My music is a way for me to express myself. Music is a continuous work in progress and I am constantly learning something new and exciting every time I play. I have learned a great deal from the people I have met, jammed with, and talked to during my nine years of playing the dulcimer. This traditional music has a unique history all its own and it seems like I make a new discovery every time I get to play. Each song was written by someone who has experienced some-

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thing that impacted their lives and who wanted a way to express it. Music gave them the outlet. The mountain dulcimer has given this experience to me."

When asked how his perception of the dulcimer has changed over the years, Jeff replied, "At the age of 9, playing the dulcimer was just something I could do that no one else my age could. It gave me the self confidence I needed. Playing as fast as I could was very important at the time, not what the song was about or the history of the instrument. Now, at the age of 18, I have learned about the history, how to interpret the music, and an understanding of how important the mountain dulcimer is to American History. I did an English term paper on the history of the mountain dulcimer and was surprised at the amount of knowledge I have acquired in nine years, and how much I have yet to learn. I believe the dulcimer is one of the most unique and adaptable instruments we have. The only way we can make people aware of the instrument is to play for different groups of people who may never have heard of a dulcimer, and to play all kinds of music to show its versatility."

As Jeff grew, so did his love of music and his enjoyment of songs that were not customarily played on a mountain dulcimer. He heard David Schnaufer and other nationally known dulcimer players and teachers at the Mississippi and Louisiana dulcimer festivals. The family realized that he was serious about continuing to play, so they drove him to Nashville, Tennessee several times a year to take lessons.

Jeff said, "I was around 12 or 13 when I first met David. After meeting him and listening to him play I decided that I wanted to take lessons from him. I was totally blown away by David's playing style and wanted to learn to play like that. It wasn't so much that David taught me how to play like him, but how to make the songs come to life. David corrected some of the bad habits I had started to acquire and he taught me techniques. David also encouraged me to let my own personality come out in my music. David has taken me from just a dulcimer player to a dulcimer musician."

When asked what the best advice was he received from Schnaufer, he replied, "Always remember the history of the instrument and never forget its origins. Be willing introduce the dulcimer to all styles and types of music and take it one step further and blaze new trails. Be willing to pass your knowledge along. Above all else—follow your dreams."

As a member of his church worship team at the Crossways Community Church, Jeff plays the dulcimer every Sunday morning during the service. He plays the clarinet and mountain dulcimer in his high school band. In his sophomore year the high school marching band played a rendition of Aaron Copeland's "Hoe Down" that included a dulcimer solo. This was definitely a first in marching band history and had everyone talking about the mountain dulcimer. The band took their show to competitions and was continually rated All Superior.

Jeff has also released his first CD, produced by David Schnaufer, called *It's Dulcimer Time* featuring appearances by Schnaufer, Lee Rowe, T. J. Larkin, and Sarah Elisabeth. This CD was not created with only dulcimer traditionalists in mind, as Jeff represents the interests of teenagers in his three original tunes (themes of Rock N Roll and Hot Cars), along with ballads, blues and some fast-paced dance tunes.

What does the future hold for this young man? "In 20 years I will be 38. I hope to have completed my PhD and be teaching at a university that has allowed me to start a degree program in mountain dulcimer. I do realize that "blazing new trails" is difficult and some ways of thinking are hard to overcome, no one every thought a mountain dulcimer could play in a marching band. I hope to have had the opportunity to play a variety of music events around the country and to promote the dulcimer and encourage people to learn how to play."

Jeff firmly believe that if you can hear a tune you can play it on a dulcimer. Currently he teaches private lessons, leads workshops and performs at festivals. His instrument collection includes instruments by McSpadden (Schnaufer Model, Schnaufer Six String, Ginger, Baritone and Dulci-Banjo) along with a solid body electric dulcimer by Elloree (modified by Dan Blom) and a Ban-Jammer by Mike Clemmer.

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dulcimermusic@bellsouth.net
jeffhames.com

Deb Porter is a nationally known teacher and performer and has created several videos/DVDs and books on learning to play the mountain dulcimer. Her latest book/CD of mountain dulcimer tab is Carter Family Tunes for the Fretted Dulcimer.

[Editor's Note: David Schnaufer, an inspiration and musical guide for Jeff Hames, died on August 23, 2006. Please read about David in the Silver Chord column in this issue of *Dulcimer Players News.*]

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From New England to England:

An Interview with Matthew John Bascetta

by Petra Jones
Leicester, England

Matthew John Bascetta's fascination with mountain dulcimers and acoustic instruments has led to him becoming one of a new generation of young luthiers producing unique mountain dulcimers with beautiful gemstone inlays. As a child, he spent much of his time staring in wonder at dulcimers and Irish harps through the glass of his local Folkcraft shop in New England (Winsted, Connecticut), little knowing that he would be making them himself someday thousands of miles away in the UK.

Matthew enthuses, "I first saw a dulcimer at the Folkcraft shop probably when I was 11 or 12. Until that point I only really thought of stringed instruments that were like guitars, with a neck and a body. This was the first time I really thought about zither type instruments. The Folkcraft instruments are great looking and sounding dulcimers, so I was impressed by such an interesting instrument that until then I had never heard of until then." A few years later and he was playing one himself. "I borrowed a Folkcraft dulcimer from a cousin of mine. I started playing at first because I was just beginning to play folk music and I wanted that Irish sort of sound. I got into folk after listening to Fairport Convention when I was 14. From then on it was all acoustic. After a while I learned how versatile an instrument the dulcimer is. You can work it into so many kinds of music."

When his high school finally presented him with the chance to work at Folkcraft, Matthew jumped at the chance. It was then that he discovered the Aladdin's cave workshop at the back of the shop, where each dulcimer was born. Surrounded by mountain and hammered dulcimers, Matthew was bitten by the bug.

Matthew enthuses, "They mostly had me checking frets and set-ups and buffing out finishes, but I learned an amazing amount about how an acoustic instrument works." His thirst for knowledge still left unquenched, Matthew decided to apprentice with luthier Ivon Schmukler in Massachusetts.

Matthew explains, "He's a master craftsman who taught me so much about the right tools and materials for the craft. I learned a strict precision working for him. At that time I also went back to work for Folkcraft building mountain dulcimers."

With high school finally over, Europe beckoned—and the lad from Connecticut decided to travel across the Atlantic in pursuit of his dream. "I found out that England has a large number of good programs for guitar and violin making, so I thought I'd become a luthier. That's just slightly less risky than going on the road and trying to make it in the music business! I moved to Leeds in the UK and studied classical guitar and violin making at the Leeds College of music. We had excellent tutors and I learned a lot about French polishing and traditional hand tool methods. I built a few dulcimers and mandolins while at college and finished up with a classical guitar as my final project. I focus now on mountain dulcimers, steel-string guitar, mandolin family instruments and repairs for those instruments."

When asked what the most important part of a dulcimer is and just how the type of wood affects the instrument's sound, Matthew reveals, "The top is the most important part of an instrument. Just like with a guitar or violin, I use quartersawn spruce or cedar. The spruce gives brilliant, powerful sound quality—especially Sitka spruce. European spruce has more color in the sound but not quite as much power. Cedar gives a warmer and mellower sound, but sometimes lacks in volume. I test all of the tops for stiffness and tone before working on them. For the back and sides I use a wide variety of domestic and exotic hardwoods. I like mahogany and walnut the best. They give a great even sound and help to warm up the dulcimer sound. Indian rosewood is nice if a lot of projection is needed for jams and accompaniment; it works well with a floating bridge sound. For the center staffs and heads I like mahogany for its stability, but

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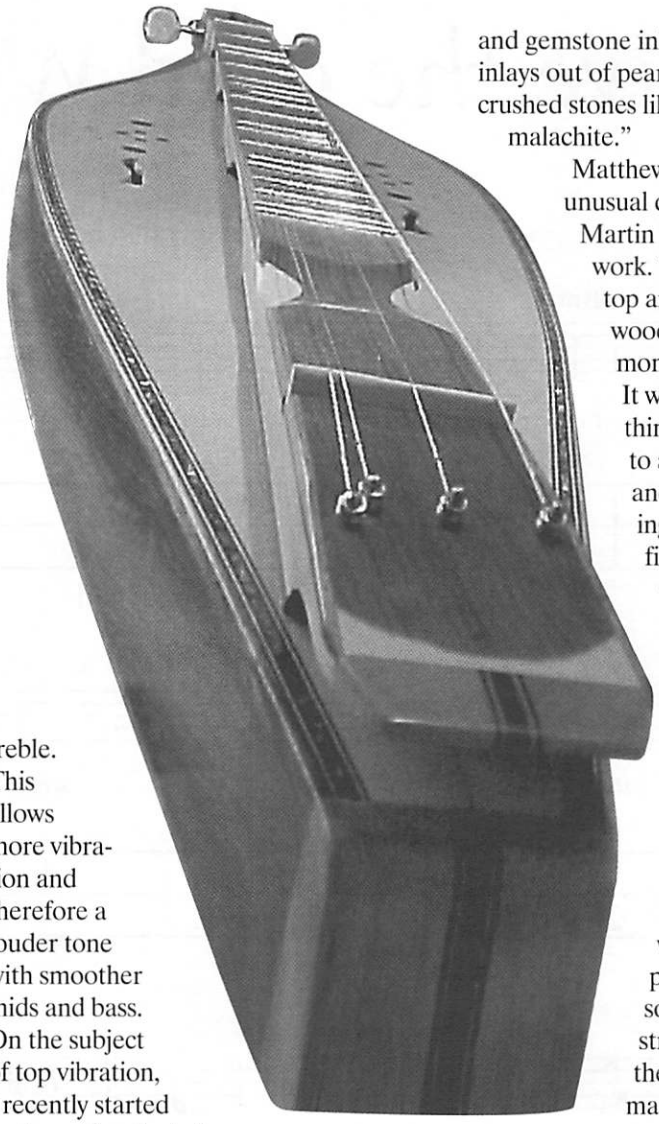
on some models I use maple or walnut. The fingerboard surface is usually rosewood, but on request I can use a number of different hardwoods."

Matthew uses hand tools primarily, so a dulcimer can take him about a month to build from start to finish. "I always start with the top and back. They are both made of two pieces of book-matched wood (split from the same billet, side by side) joined in the middle. After they are glued up I plane them to thickness by hand and carve the tone holes in the top. Tops are usually about 2.8mm at the thickest point (depending on the cut of wood). Then I make the center staff and fingerboard and cut the fret slots and the arches of the staff. It's then glued onto the top, then the top and back are braced. Next I'll work on the head and the internal blocks. The head has a carved pegbox for the tuning machines, like a violin. This has to be carved by hand then smoothed out. When the inside blocks are done, the ribs can be bent to the body shape. I bend by hand using a hot aluminium pipe. The ribs get glues to the blocks. The top is attached to the ribs, then the head is glued in place and finally the back. Depending on the instrument and the customer's preferences I will then put in some custom fancy bits like inlays and marquetry. Then I do a test string-up and check out how it sounds and plays. When all is well I take the hardware off and French polish. At least a week of that time is the French polished finish. I like to leave a satin finish, but sometimes polish to a high gloss. The hardware is put back on and the instrument is set up."

All of Mathew's instruments are custom built for the client, so what they play and how they play is taken into account in the design. Matthew also incorporates a number of special features into his mountain dulcimers. He reveals, "I brace the tops and backs on all my dulcimers to support and control the tone. A lot of dulcimers are made without braces and hold up fine, but the top's reaction to the vibration of the strings can really be controlled and aided by the use of braces. I also graduate my dulcimer tops like a custom guitar. This means the edges of the top are slightly thinner than the middle, and the bass side is slightly thinner than the treble. This allows more vibration and therefore a louder tone with smoother mids and bass. On the subject of top vibration, I recently started undercutting the tail end of the fingerboard so that it isn't anchored to top over the inside tail block. This makes a huge difference to the flexibility of the top. It gives a louder and clearer sound."



Matthew is a great fan of the LR Baggs transducer dulcimer pickups and offers this feature in his mountain dulcimers. "The pickup is well balanced and set up for mountain dulcimer stringing. It takes the place of the saddle and can be filed and shaped like an ordinary saddle. The amp pugs into a standard quarter inch jack that comes out the tail end of the instrument. Until this came along most players had to put soundboard transducers on the top of their instruments. You don't see any wires with this pickup; it's unnoticeable except for the endpin jack."

But the most unique aspects of Matthew's mountain dulcimers are the crystal and gemstone inlays. "I offer custom inlays out of pearls and abalone as well as crushed stones like lapis, turquoise, and malachite."

Matthew reveals the most unusual dulcimer was made for Martin Pleass for his new solo work. "It's made from a spruce top and Madagascar rosewood, which is an uncommon wood for a dulcimer. It was made with an extra thin staff and fingerboard to allow for more vibration, and has flamed Koa bindings around the body and fingerboard. The head has crushed turquoise inlay and 5 star planetary tuners—the best you can get. It was made with a teardrop body, but one that is a bit strange to accommodate for Martin's playing style (he holds the dulcimer on its side and strums it like a guitar). It was edged with abalone pearl around the top like some of the finer steel string guitars. It was by far the fanciest dulcimer I ever made and it has a beautiful sparkly sound that can get really powerful when plugged in." Matthew's enthusiasm is palpable and he remains a committed luthier who still retains his childlike wonder, passion and enthusiasm for mountain dulcimers and the wonderful tone they can produce.

Matthew John Bascetta
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matthew@mjbluthier.co.uk
mjbluthier.co.uk/

Based in Leicester, England, Petra Jones is a freelance music journalist and multi-instrumentalist. Her dulcimer history feature appeared in the September 2006 issue of Music Mart *magazine in the UK.*

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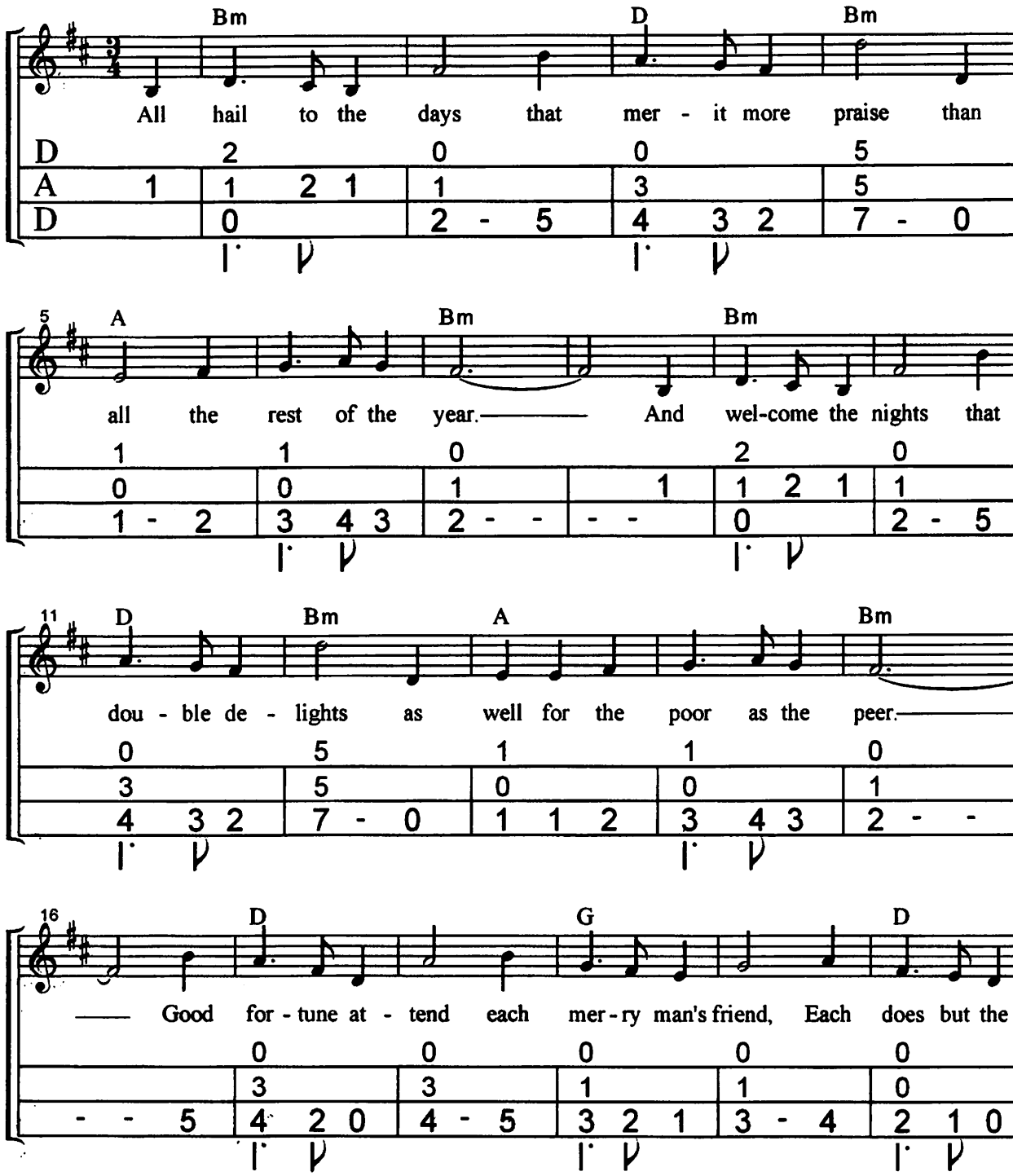
To Drive the Cold Winter Away

English Traditional, 17th Century
Arr. by Lori Keddell, 2004

Bm Aeolian



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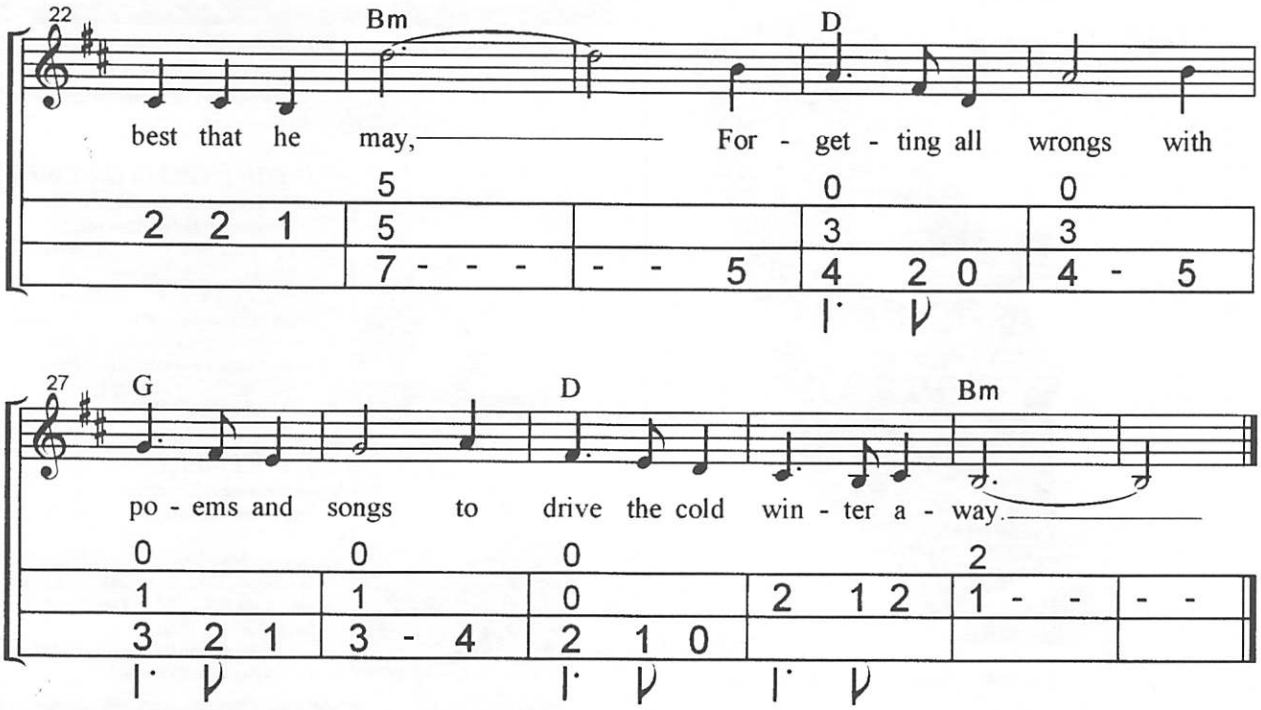

2. Tis ill for the mind to anger incline
To think of small injuries now.
If wrath be to seek, don't lend her thy cheek
Don't let her inhabit thy brow.
Cross out of thy books maleveolent looks,
Both beauty and youth decay,
And spend the long night in honest delight
To drive the cold winter away.

3. When Christmastide comes in like a bride
And holly and ivy clad,
Twelve days in the year must mirth and good cheer
In every household be had.
The popular guise is then to devise
All manner of holiday play.
Both women and men do the best that they can
To drive the cold winter away.

4. This time of the year is spent in good cheer
With neighbors who gather to meet;
Just sit by the fire with friendly desire
With other in love to greet.
All grudges forgot are put in the pot,
All sorrows aside they lay.
The old and the young do carol this song
To drive the cold winter away.

The words for this carol are a version of an early 17th century ballad. An original version can be found in a broadside collection under the heading "A Pleasant Country new Ditty: Merrily shewing how to drive the cold winter away." The tune by the same name can be found in John Playford's 1651 *The English Dancing Master.* There the tune is a lively jig to accompany a three-part longways dance.

Lori Keddell has been playing dulcimer for more than twenty years. She has taught classes and workshops for children and adults in New York, Vermont and Massachusetts, and loves turning beginners into budding dulcimaniacs! She has coordinated the annual Mountain Dulcimer Music Fest in Albany, New York for the past eighteen years, and has published three books of dulcimer arrangements. Lori Keddell, 119 County Highway 107, Johnstown NY 12095, 518-762-7516, Lark119@sitlink.net.

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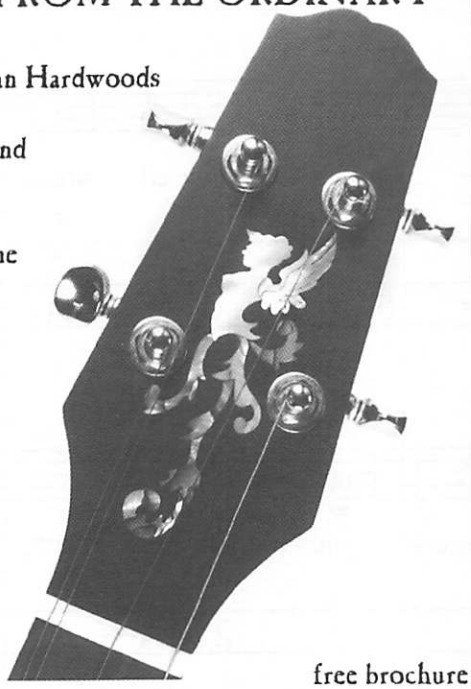
STEP UP FROM THE ORDINARY



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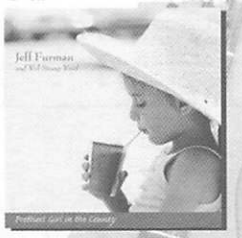

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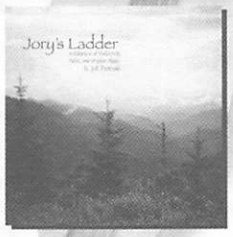

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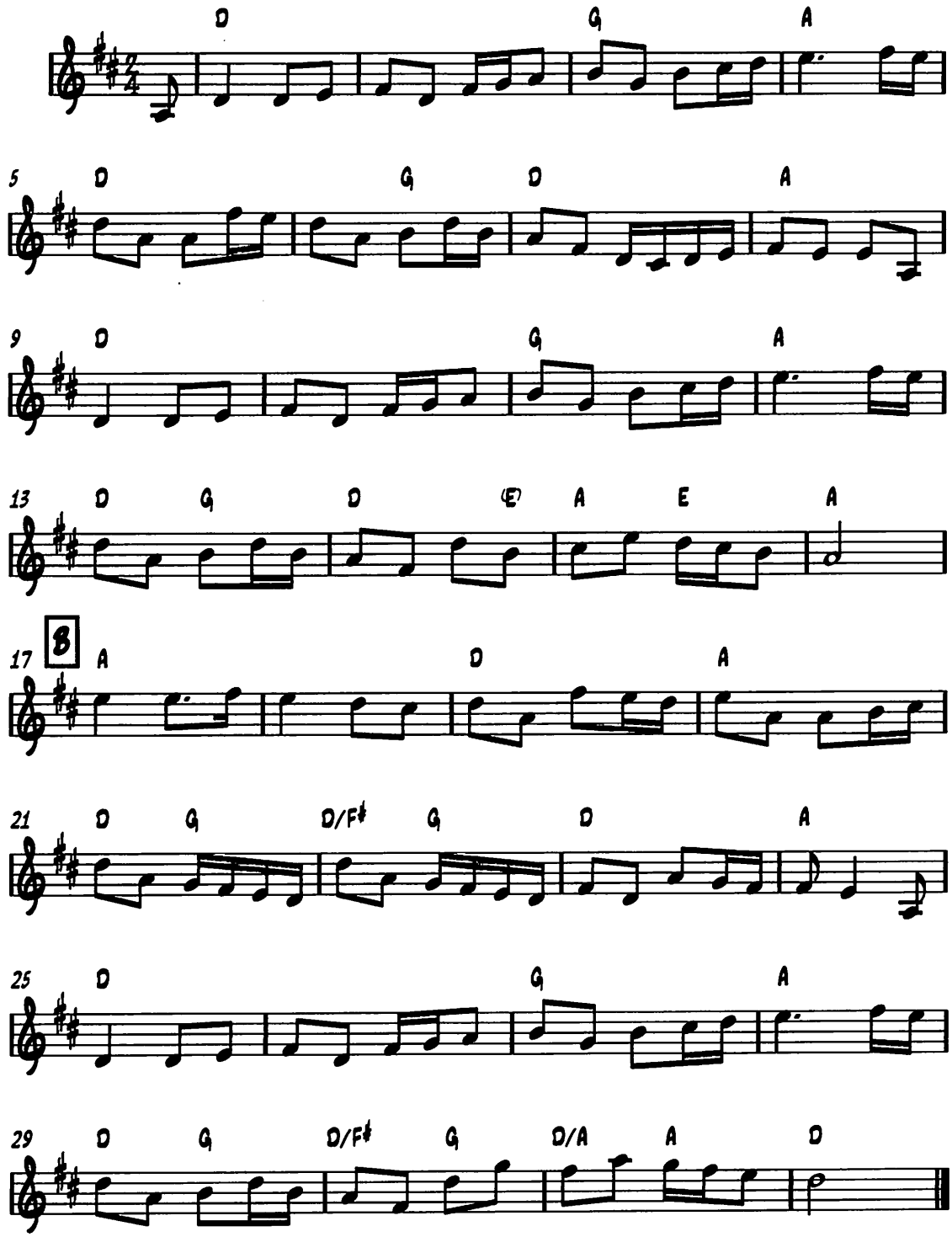
Dublin Bells

Moderate tempo

Jody Marshall, © 2006



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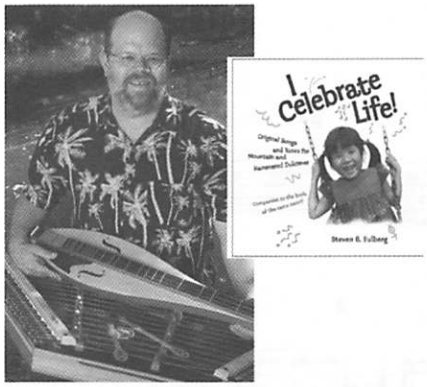

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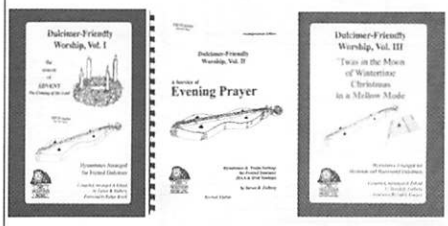

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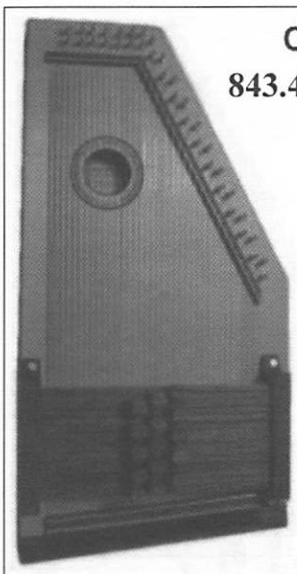

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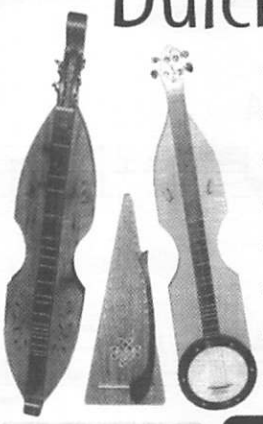

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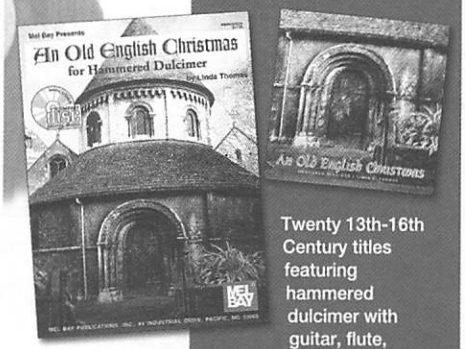

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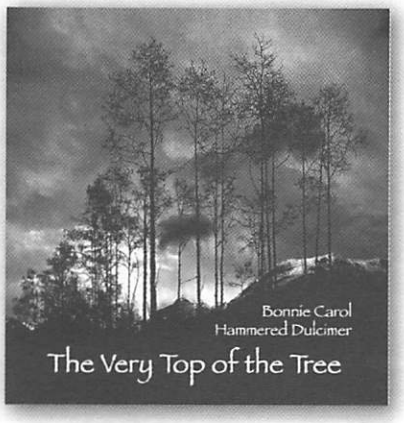

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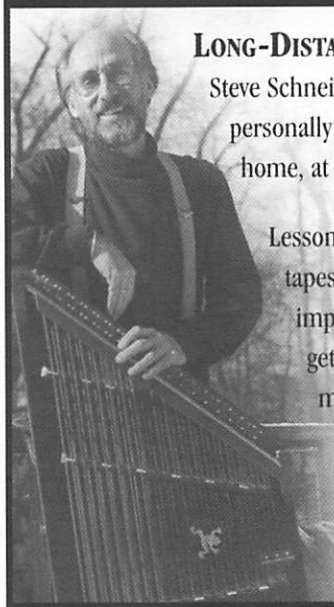

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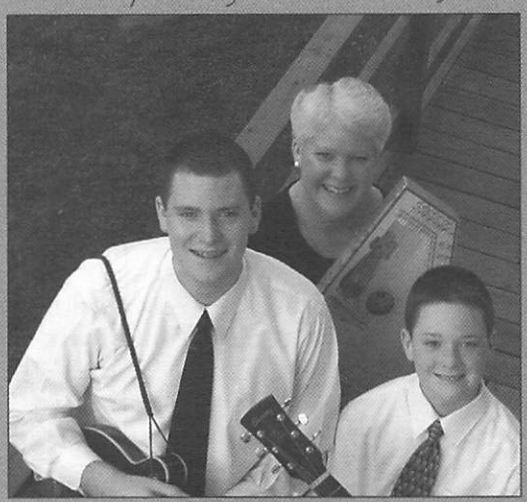

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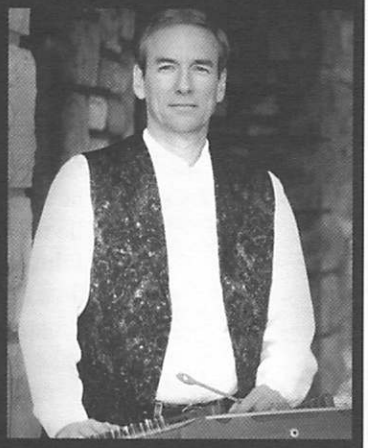

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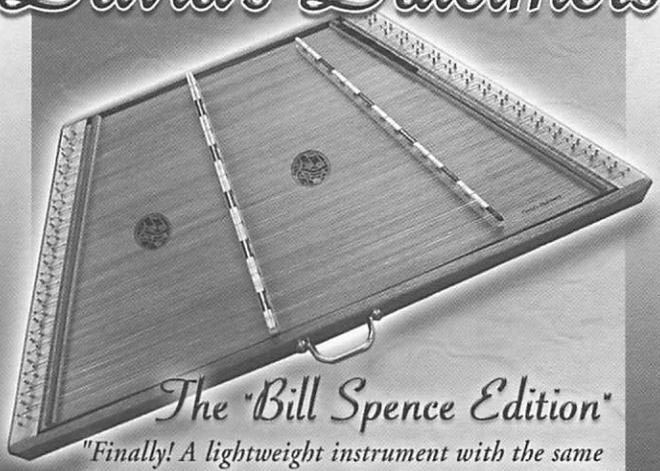

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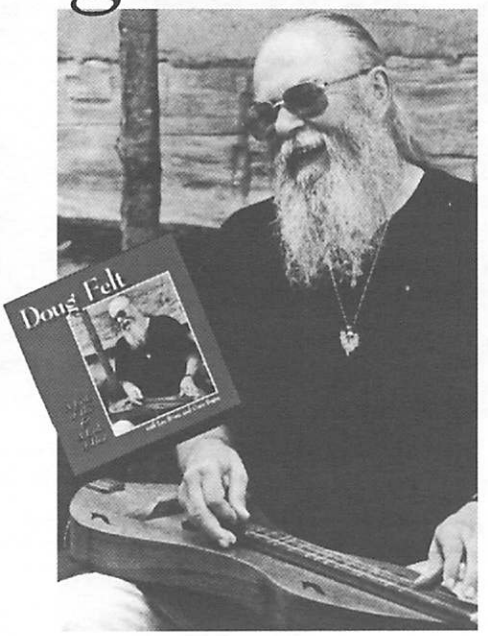

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The Silver Chord

A very special person in our dulcimer community who was also an extraordinary mountain dulcimer player, **David Schnaufer,** died on August 23, 2006. David is the reason I play the mountain dulcimer, pure and simple. I heard his album, *Dulcimer Deluxe,* sometime in the mid-1980's, and immediately had a new-found respect for this simple little 3-stringed box and what it could do in the right hands.

I started "following him around" from festival to festival, taking as many classes from him as possible. The first one was at the Great Black Swamp Dulcimer Festival in Lima, Ohio. As impressive as his music was, what really got my attention was his teaching method. All of his workshops were "filled to overflowing," but I noticed that no matter how many students were in the class, and no matter what their level, somehow he was able to "touch" each one individually, and

give them exactly what they needed at that point. He had a deep and genuine respect for music, whatever genre; for those who made music, at whatever level; and for those who listened to and appreciated music, whatever the venue.

At that same festival in Lima, during his set on the main stage concert, in front of perhaps 400-500 people, in the middle of some speed-of-light fiddle tune, he suddenly stopped and told the audience that he had just made a mistake. Though he knew that many were not even aware of the mistake, he wanted everyone to hear the tune the way it was supposed to sound. With everyone's indulgence, he wanted to back up, get a running start, and try it again. When he got to that point the second time and "nailed it," a huge ear-to-ear grin came over his face—and the audience burst into spontaneous applause.

His great talent was matched only by his humility. It drew us in and and inspired us. The impact David had on the music world in general, and the dulcimer world in particular, cannot be overstated. But those contributions, as amazing as they are, are dwarfed by the impact he had on the lives of all those with whom he came in contact. His was a kind and gentle spirit, with a certain grace that made all of us better human beings just by having the privilege of knowing him. Anyone who met David, even once for five minutes, came away feeling as though he was one of their best friends. The truth is, he was!

I have a vision of what some of those heavenly jam sessions must be like today. I'm sure by now David has gotten together with Hank Williams (Sr), Chet Atkins, Roy Acuff, Bill Monroe, Johnny Cash, Ray Charles, and Bob Wills—and with Thelonius Monk, Mississippi John Hurt, Jerry Garcia. And of course Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart. He got to meet and play music with some of these folks in this world, but even those that he did not, I can just see him going up to them, sticking out his hand, and saying, "Howdy, I'm David, I play the mountain dulcimer. Wanna pick some?" He's still paving the way for the rest of us for when we get there.

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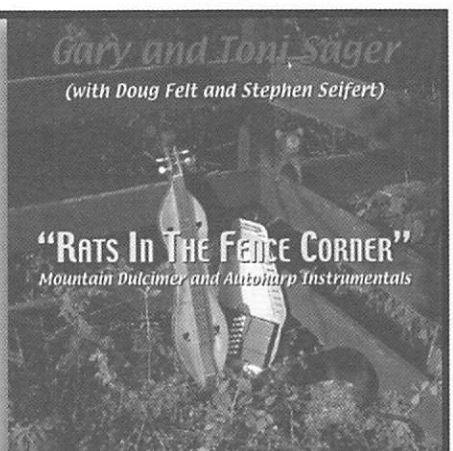

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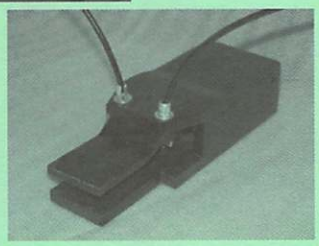

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My sister, **Betty Barrett,** who died July 22, 2006, didn't play the dulcimer. But she was one of our most wonderful advocates, and that's why I want to remember her in this issue of *Dulcimer Players News.* When I first began my life as a dulcimer player, she asked me many questions and mentioned now and then that she "might learn to play one." In the 1980's I traveled to California for the Summer Solstice Dulcimer Festivals, and she enthusiastically attended them with me… still with the spoken wish of "learning to play one some day." She kept up with the festival, attending it even when I wasn't there to perform and teach. I'd get enthusiastic phone calls from her about how much fun she had listening and "dropping my name." I'd perform in California, possibly as far away from the Los Angeles area as a hundred or two hundred miles, and she, her husband Dick, and one or more of her grown children would be part of the audience.

I sent her *Dulcimer Players News,* and often I'd hear from her about something interesting she read about you—the dulcimer community. "One of these days I'll have to play a dulcimer; everyone has so much fun with the instrument." It didn't happen, but she was one of our strongest friends. She paid attention to us!

In return, I had the privilege of "making Betty's life interesting" while I was growing up. Those of you with older sisters can probably relate to the following story.

Our family moved to Richmond when I was 5 and Betty was 16. Just getting interested in dating, she was. We had to share a room, an attic-type room, so it was large. Betty had a stuffed Bambi deer, about 2 feet tall, that had been given to her. (By a nice boy, perhaps?) I wasn't allowed to play with it, but that didn't stop me. Whenever she wasn't around…

One day I decided the deer needed a bath. I filled the bathtub (probably added soap) and put Bambi in. As you can guess, almost immediately

the stuffing inside Bambi soaked up most of the water, and I realized I was in a bit of bathing trouble. I pulled Bambi out and started squishing. Not much good. Then, to get the water out of the legs, I twisted one. The metal inside the leg, allowing Bambi to stand, poked through. The dye on the outside "fur" ran, and the yarn nose and lips faded, making the general area a very interesting pink. After getting out as much water as I could (which wasn't much) I got one of Betty's lipsticks and recolored the mouth area; breaking the lipstick, of course. Then I stood Bambi up awkwardly, and hoped my efforts wouldn't be noticed by anyone.

Interestingly, I can't remember exactly what happened after the washing episode was discovered. The best part is, however, that we became so close through the years to follow. And she was one of your close friends!

Maddie MacNeil

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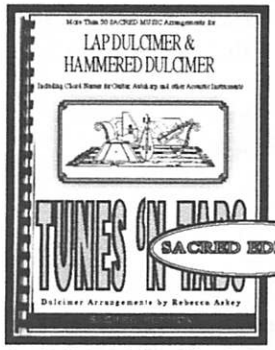

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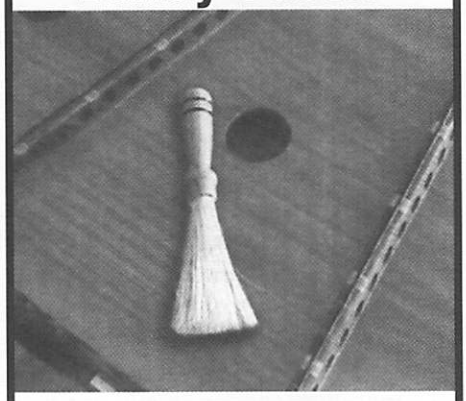
Dandy Duster



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What's New

by Neal Walters

Troll Road • *Mark Gilston, info@markgilston.com, markgilston.com (CD)*

Mark, who lives in Austin, TX, is a skilled musician on a variety of instruments. He grew up listening to 78's and LP's of American, Russian, Spanish, Caribbean and Israeli folk music. He developed an interest in Balkan music in his early teens and later discovered Swedish spelsman music while falling in love with the traditional fiddle music of Sweden. His new CD puts all of these influences to work with some amazing work on both concertina and dulcimer. It's completely different from most of the music you hear being performed on dulcimer and it's worth a good listen!

Christmas with a Heart • *Heartstrings Dulcimer Quartet, 1450 Greenwood Road, Tallassee, AL 36078, 334-283-3045, heartstrings2@charter.net (CD)*

Heartstrings is a foursome who grew out of the Montgomery, Alabama dulcimer club. Bob and Rose Taunton are husband and wife; Betty Reeves and Barbara Betts are mother and daughter. They began with the germ of an idea to perform a program of Christmas music for church and civic groups. They've now branched out into folk, old time fiddle tunes, and gospel music with a very busy playing schedule. Their first CD is a well-polished program of Christmas favorites performed on mountain dulcimer, banjo, hammered dulcimer, guitar, whistle, and bowed psaltery. The arrangements are well constructed and well played; an excellent debut. Selections include Christmas Time's A-Coming/Overture, Judah's Land, Come Thou Long Expected Jesus, and Angels We Have Heard on High.

True Colors of a Mountain Dulcimer • *Terry Duggins, Kalmana Records/CD Diva, RR 3 Box 1316, Pahoa HI 86778, 808-982-9222 (CD)*

Terry's latest recording finds him adapting classical, Celtic, Elizabethan, Appalachian, contemporary and miscellaneous folk tunes from Japan, Russia, and Hawaii to the dulcimer with impressive results. He gets a lot of support from Richard Lee on clarinet, wood flute, pennywhistle, and oboe and from Alice Nelson on harmony vocals. Tunes include La Volta and Three Dulcimers, The Praties, Just a Soul, Hawaiian Green Rose Hula Melody, and Ned of the Hill.

Carter Family Tunes Arranged for Fretted Dulcimer • *Debbie Porter, Lyric's Mama Music, PO Box 267, Pittsburg, TX 75686, 903-856-2774, lyricsmama@aol.com, debbieporter.net (Book/CD)*

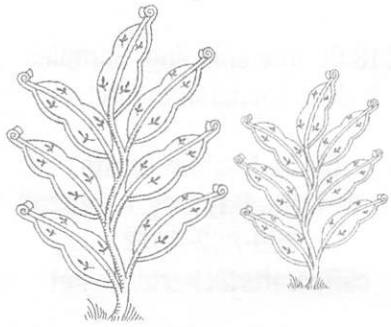
Debbie has worked with Peer International to present tablature arrangements of twelve of the most popular Carter Family standards in her new book with an accompanying CD. If you've wanted to learn some of the Carter Family repertoire, this is your chance! The twelve songs are Bury Me Under the Weeping Willow, Can the Circle Be Unbroken, Give Me the Roses While I Live, Gold Watch and Chain, Happiest Days of all, Keep on the Sunny Side, I'm Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes, Little Darling Pal of Mine, Storms Are on the Ocean, Wabash Cannonball, Are You Tired of Me, My Darling?, and Worried Man Blues.

Stephen Siefert, Lesson 6 • *Steve Siefert, 1260 Old Charlotte Pike, Pegram, TN 37143, 615-353-8230, stephenseifert.com (Book/CD Sets)*

Lesson 6 in Steve's monthly video series focuses on chords. This particular lesson covers basic chords for beginners, major and minor chords all over the fretboard for intermediate players, and various voicings and playing techniques for advanced students. The booklet contains charts that lay everything out in simple pictures and the DVD provides audio examples to listen to and for practice.

Beginning Bowed Psaltery • *Donna Missigman, 20 Hilary Lane, PO Box 6, Laporte, PA 18626, 570-946-7841, dulcimer@epix.net, missigman-music.com (CD)*

Donna Missigman's new Bowed Psaltery instruction book, while not a dulcimer book per se, is worth a mention here, particularly if you read music. There are nearly fifty classic melodies in the book that all sound good on hammered or mountain dulcimer even though they are arranged for psaltery. Some just have the melody in standard notation and some contain recommended chord accompaniment. The tunes are simple enough to work out on either dulcimer and should prove to be a worthwhile endeavor for those of you who would like to move towards becoming tablature-independent.



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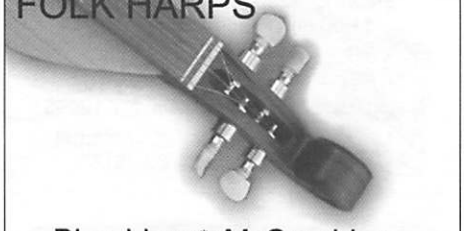

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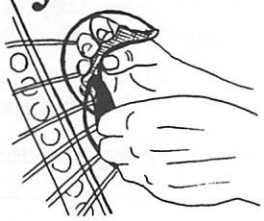

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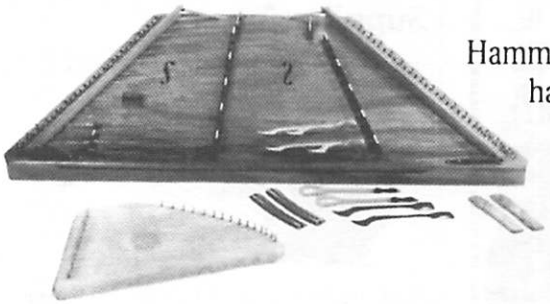

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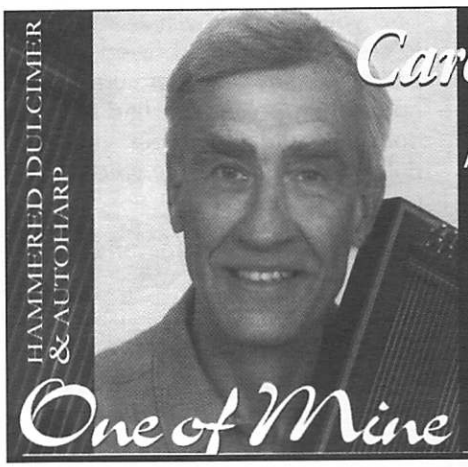

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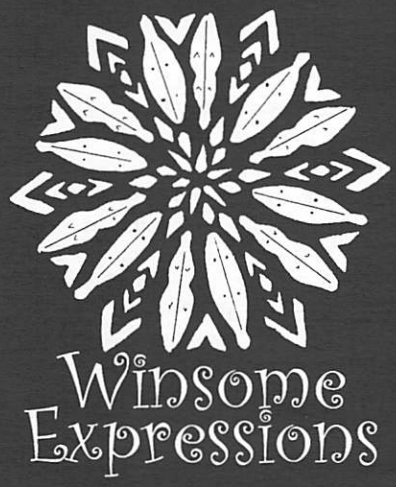

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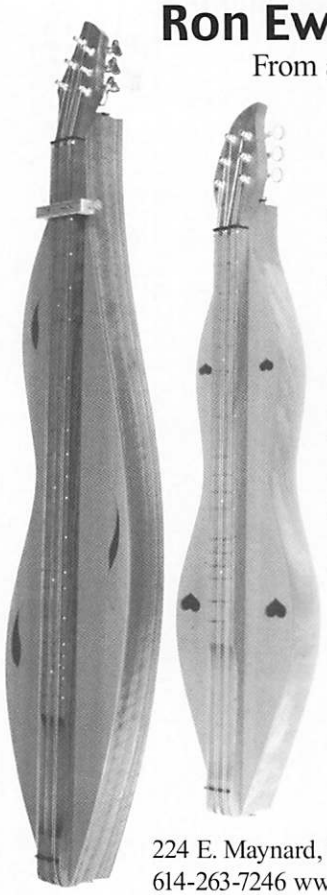

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